

John Gay
The Wife of Bath: A Comedy
(1713 version)

Gently Modernized
by
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———*Magicis sanos avertere sacris
Experiar sensus.* (Virgil, *Eclogues*, vii. 66–7).

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Dramatis Personæ.

Men.

Chaucer.

Doggrell.

Franklyn, a rich yeoman of Kent.

Doublechin, a monk.

Merit, in love with Florinda.

Astrolabe, an astrologer.

Antony and William, servants to Franklyn.

A Drawer.

Women.

Myrtilla, a lady of quality.

Florinda, Franklyn's daughter.

Alison, the Wife of Bath.

Busie, Myrtilla's woman.

Scene: An inn, lying in the road between London and Canterbury.

Time: From nine at night to nine in the morning.

Prologue.

Spoken by Florinda

If ancient poets thought the prologue fit
To sport away superfluous starts of wit,
Why should we moderns lavish ours away
And, to supply the prologue, starve the play?
Thus plays of late, like marriages in fashion,
Have nothing good besides the preparation.
How shall we do to help our author out,
Who both for play and prologue is in doubt?
He draws his characters from Chaucer's days,
On which our grandsires are profuse of praise;
When all mankind, if we'll believe tradition,
Jogged on in settled conjugal fruition:
Then, as old wives with serious nod will tell us,
The wise contented husband ne'er was jealous;
The youthful bride no separate trading drives,
Ev'n citizens could... satisfy their wives.
The cautious virgin, ignorant of man,
No glances threw, nor exercised the fan,
Found love a stranger to her easy breast,
And till the wedding night... enjoyed her rest.
No gilded chariot drew the ladies' eyes,
Ensnared their hearts, and bore away the prize;
Then the strict father no hard bargains drove
For jointures; all their settlement was... love.
Believe all this who will, for—let me die!—
They knew the world as well as you and I.
Lovers would then, as nowadays, forswear,
Seize the soft moment, and surprise the fair,
And many a modest, knowing bride was led
With artful blushes to the nuptial bed.
Our author hath from former ages shown
Some ancient frailties which are still our own;
The Wife of Bath in our weak wives we find,
And superstition runs through all the kind;
We but repeat our grandsires' actions o'er,
And copy follies which were theirs before.

Act I. Scene I.
Scene: A large hall.

Enter Franklyn and Doggrell.

Franklyn. Florinda, poor rogue, little thinks she shall lie in wedding-sheets tomorrow. Never fear, boy, I'll answer for the girl's inclinations.

Doggrell. Her beauty is, I must confess, most exquisitely charming, and her fortune will allow of no exceptions; but you know her extraction, sir...

Franklyn. What? Though I did marry my servant-maid, I have pretty good assurances my daughter is of my own begetting! And, in troth, a staunch country gentleman and an honest, plain, downright Kentish damsel may raise as good a breed as a lady and a *valet de chambre*, though her lord have faith and fondness enough to own himself the father.

Doggrell. But in the eye of the world, sir, a family is corrupted by an alliance with the vulgar. What a scurvy figure will my marriage make in a genealogical table, to be recorded in this manner: Francis D'Ogrelle, Esquire, married Florinda, daughter of Amos Franklyn by Dorothy Turnbroach his kitchen-wench — faugh!

Franklyn. Why, how now, Frank? D'Ogrelle? Do-puppy, I think! Thy grandfather's name was Doggrell, and thy father's name was Doggrell. Look you, sir: and when my daughter loses the name of Franklyn, she shall be called no otherwise than Florinda Doggrell, d'ye see.

Doggrell. Not so passionate, sir, I beseech you. The fault in former centuries lay in the orthography and pronunciation. My name is originally of French extraction, and is written with a D and an apostrophe, as much as to say, De Ogrelle, which was the antique residence of my ancestors.

Franklyn. Come, come, Frank, this is not a time of day to dispute of families. We are now got about the mid-way to Canterbury, and within twelve miles of my house.

Enter Merit.

Merit. Excuse my freedom, gentlemen, I am about to engage myself in an affair of consequence, and beg you would oblige me in being witnesses of the contract.

Franklyn. A mortgage or a conveyance of some part of thy patrimony, I suppose; how much per cent do you give in these ticklish times, with good security?

Merit. Mine, sir, is only a conveyance of my person; and knowing the inconstancy of female love, I would not willingly, methinks, have so serious an affair as matrimony depend long upon a woman's pleasure.

Franklyn. Very right, sir: a good sailor always lays hold of the first fair wind, and a judicious lover never stays for a second consent.

Merit. Come on then, old gentleman.

Franklyn. Here, Frank, is an example for you, a brisk, jolly, handsome young fellow, that plunges into matrimony with a resolution. Pray, sir, may I presume to know your mistress's pedigree?

Merit. If you would judge of her descent by her conversation, Pallas was her mother; if by her beauty, Venus.

Franklyn. But who was it, friend, that begot her?

Merit. That is a point we must leave to the mother's determination.

Franklyn. Is she of this country, sir?

Merit. In short, sir, she is a plain, simple Kentish yeoman's daughter she has virtue without formality; all the good breeding of the court with the country simplicity; beauty without vanity, and wit without affectation.

Doggrell. But a family, sir, would add a lustre to these endowments; and these qualities appear very awkward in a woman of mean extraction.

Merit. Virtue, sir, becomes all alike, and there's no true nobility without it.

Franklyn. Well said, i'faith! What say you to that Mr. Doggrell, with your D'Ogrelles, pedigrees, family tables, and extractions?

Doggrell. You expose me, sir! D'Ogrelle is my name, and was I not under some restraint by my father's will, your behaviour would make me quit all pretensions to your daughter.

Franklyn. Never insist then upon pedigrees, Frank. A single tree in my wood, I'll maintain it, is worth all the genealogical trees in the universe. Come, Frank, let us go and be witnesses of his happy conjunction: and tomorrow, sir, I shall desire you would make one at the wedding of this gentleman with my daughter.

Merit. You do me too much honour, sir.

Franklyn. You must know, sir, that we came thus far with the Canterbury Pilgrims, certainly the most diverting company that ever travelled the road, and, my house lying in the way, I design to invite them all to the wedding tomorrow.

Doggrell. And there is a nun of quality, I am told, hath just now joined them.

Franklyn. The Wife of Bath is enough to make any mortal split his sides. She is as frolicsome as a young wench in the month of May, plays at romps with the pilgrims all round, throws out as many quaint jokes as an Oxford Scholar; and, in short, exerts herself so facetiously that she is the mirth of the whole company.

Doggrell. But the support of the society is Mr. Chaucer: he is a gentleman of such inexhaustible good sense, breeding, and civility, that since I have had the happiness to converse with him, he hath honoured some of my productions with his approbation—

Franklyn. Hold, hold, Doggrell: if once thou dost let loose thy tongue upon the topic of poetry, we shall quickly be bewildered upon the Muses' promontory. Ah, boy! tomorrow night it will be thy turn. Come, sir, we are now ready to wait on you.

Exeunt.

Enter Myrtilia in a nun's habit, Alison and Busie.

Alison. A nun at these years, and with so much beauty! Fie, fie, madam! Nunneries and hospitals had originally the same Institution; they are only for the maimed, and those that are worn out in the service; and shall a lady that hath all her five senses to perfection, with the bloom

of youth on her cheeks, and sprightliness in her eyes, hide all those charms in a cloister? Lookye, my dear, if you are for confinement... I would by all means advise you to a husband.

Myrtilla. When tis allotted by the stars that a person shall always remain in the state of virginity, tis but common prudence to retire from the world.

Alison. Were it my case, by my troth, I should beg the stars pardon. Besides, I do not think it in the power of all the stars in the firmament to influence so ticklish a thing as a woman's inclination.

Myrtilla. But all the astrologers that I ever was so unhappy as to consult seem to hint at the same thing.

Alison. An astrologer's prediction, like an oracle, is not to be unravelled till after the event. And do but once, honey, pitch upon a husband, and the planets, I'll pass my word for it, shall very readily give their consent.

Myrtilla. Besides, I have tried three Midsummer Eves successively, and there hath not been so much as the shadow of a man.

Alison. What signifies the *shadow*, when your ladyship hath youth and beauty enough at any time to command the *substance*?

Myrtilla. But it is my resolution to retire.

Busie. (*aside*) And mine — if you stick to your resolution—to quit your service, for may I never be kissed if I can perceive that I have the least bit of nun's flesh about me!

Alison. Let me look on your hand, honey, I have as good an insight into palmistry, though I say it myself, as the best of them all. The learned vary... come, come, madam, never despair.

Myrtilla. My fortune is already determined.

Alison. (*looking on her hand*) Bow your hand a little more there, there, enough. Ods-my-life, a downright miracle of a hand! matrimony without crosses, and a most delicate table, and a brace, i'facking, of as proper handsome husbands as ever asked a lady the question.

Busie. Let us see what my hand promises come, come, a husband is every woman's concern.

Myrtilla. Nay, now I recollect, a fortune teller some time since told me the very same thing.

Alison. And that mole there, beneath the tip of your right ear, is a most shrewd sign... no, I won't tell you where there is another. Ah madam, madam.

Busie. Aye... this must be one here... with two little things branching out; for that is an infallible mark of a husband.

Alison. You search in the wrong place, child.

Busie. Well, I'm satisfied of this: if there is never a one appears in my hand, I'm sure there is one in my heart.

Alison. Lookye here, my dear, thanks to my lucky planets, I have made a shift to dispatch five already, and "Welcome the sixth!" say I, — one, two, three, four, five, — and here is another little tiny thing; and if it will not reach to a husband, my life for it, my good conduct shall make it stretch to a hopeful gallant.

Myrtilla. Methinks one's natural inclination would induce one to try matrimony once — purely for the sake of novelty — but destiny cannot be avoided.

Alison. Destiny, honey, is lodged in never a conjurer's tongue in Christendom, and a fig, say I, for that conjurer that doth not consult a lady's disposition, her age, her complexion, and the natural bent of her temper.

Myrtilla. But matrimony, perhaps, may be the more severe penance.

Alison. Most husbands — I have experienced them, madam — are tame quiet sort of animals. Tis the wife's own fault if ever she gives up the reins of government. And for jealousy, I'd advise you to my remedy: seem to be more jealous of him. I watched his waters for him; would he, an old niggard, have had ever the less light for letting a neighbour light a candle at his lantern?

Myrtilla. But you know we promise obedience; and is not the husband the lord, the head of his wife?

Alison. They claim the *title*, chicken, but, ods-my-life, we always dispute the *power*; and women, like the rudders of ships, always govern their heads.

Myrtilla. You give one mighty good encouragement, madam.

Alison. I was ever from my cradle a friend to the mathematics, madam: why, one that pewkingly dies a maid, loses the end of creation, and, in short, leaves the world without having ever tasted the true refreshments of life.

Myrtilla. But are you sure that these marks signify husbands?

Alison. Am I sure that I ever knew the comforts of one? Why, one of em, as I hope for his fellow, is at least six foot high.

Busie. (*looking on her own hand*) Nay, mine is a very long one too...

Alison. Tis a strange thing, that our English ladies should be so backward in coming to knowledge. Why, an Italian girl thinks at twelve, meditates at thirteen, ripens into perception at fourteen — and here we shall have an awkward English bride want advice on her wedding-day, though she is not married till five and twenty. Go, make haste to bed: child, think of the fortune that I have told you, and dream of a husband. (*Exit*)

Myrtilla. You remember, Busie, I flung two husbands at the last fortune-book.

Busie. Yes, madam.

Myrtilla. And I dreamt of a strange gentleman, when I slept about a week since with the bride-cake under my pillow.

Busie. (*aside*) If dreaming would have supplied one with a sweetheart, I am sure I had not been unprovided at this time of day.

Myrtilla. What is the clock?

Busie. Almost ten, madam.

Myrtilla. You remember, I suppose, this is St. Agnes's Night, and that I resolve to try the experiment of the dumb cake. (*Exit*)

Enter Chaucer

Chaucer. What, turned pilgrim, my dear, (*kisses Busie*) and must love give place to religion? Have I no hopes but by turning friar, and calling my love continence and mortification? I was very luckily, a day or two since, informed of Lady Myrtilla's resolution...

Busie. Oh, dear sir, pray how long have you been returned from your travels?

Chaucer. But just arrived. Absence, Mistress Busie, has not been able to deface the impressions of love, and still the Lady Myrtilla reigns in my bosom, haunts my waking thoughts, and is ever present in my dreams. I think, I talk, I write of nothing but her.

Busie. I am afraid, Mr. Chaucer, your case will be just the same as the boy in the fable: you have talked of love artillery, flames, eyes, and darts so long in jest, that it will be very difficult to gain belief, now you are in earnest.

Chaucer. But pray, child, is devotion or discontent the cause of her retirement? For madhouses and nunneries are as much inhabited by disappointed lovers as devotees: and I fear, should a cloister be her choice, the other would soon be my fate.

Busie. Very probably, sir, for you'll have a double pretence to it, as you are a wit too.

Chaucer. You are smart, Mistress Busie... but is there no hopes to divert her from this voluntary banishment? Has she any symptoms of love? Does she talk incoherently, sigh often, or read romances?

Busie. There are methods which perhaps might have some influence upon her; but confidantes, sir, must not divulge secrets.

Chaucer. Say'st thou so, my dear girl? — and I am come so opportunely to thy relief when thou hast so uneasy a thing as a secret in thy possession.

Busie. A secret, sir, is as safe in a woman's keeping, as a lady's reputation in a man's... But pray, dear Mr. Chaucer, don't ask me.

Chaucer. Would you have your lady lost purely upon a punctilio? I know, my dear, you have conquered your sex, and have the knack of secrecy... but a secret of this consequence... (*gives her gold*)

Busie. It is of consequence, I confess. You know, sir, my lady is as superstitious as an ignorant abbot; her humour by day depends upon her dreams by night, spilling of salt throws her into the vapours — half the week is lost upon account of unlucky days! And she has an entire confidence in astrologers: tis those wretches that have past the severe sentence of virginity on her.

Chaucer. And so she designs to sacrifice all the pleasures of life to their ignorance.

Busie. And for fear she should change her mind, which you know we are pretty much given to, she has resolved to put it out of her own power, by retiring into a cloister — but she just now was a little wavering.

Chaucer. Have the dictates of nature then at last overbiassed her superstition?

Busie. You must know, sir, the Wife of Bath just now made her a visit, and merely ridiculed her out of her project. She consulted her hand, and very agreeably contradicted all her former fortune by a promise of two husbands.

Chaucer. Which the lady, I presume, seems fond of believing?

Busie. Yes, o' my conscience, and fond of having too with the permission of the planets. This being St. Agnes' night, she hath provided the dumb cake, and performs the ceremony, in order, if tis possible, to get a glimpse of matrimony.

Chaucer. The most lucky incident in the world. Now have I the opportunity to make my approaches by way of her superstition, I can never fail of conquest. This night, pretty creature, I'll play the apparition.

Busie. Just my thought, I vow! This key of her closet, I suppose, may be of some service — for that body of yours will scarce be able to enter a chink, or pass through a key-hole! Remember the hour, and make haste to your post, sir.

Exeunt severally

Enter Franklyn, Doggrell, Doublechin and Alison

Alison. One wedding, the proverb says, begets another: what think you, old heart of oak, shall experience supply the want of youth? Come, let you and I for once verify the old saying: give me thy hand, old boy.

Franklyn. Hold, hold, dame, “marry in haste and repent at leisure”: there is a proverb for your proverb.

Doublechin. But matrimony is not like common crimes, Mr. Franklyn, for the most tedious repentance can never hope for absolution.

Franklyn. We are too old nowadays to pretend to those things.

Alison. Slidikins! Old? Old? Pray do not measure *my* corn with *your* bushel, old dry bones! This person of mine, I would have you to know, like a medlar, grows the sweeter for its age, old grey-beard.

Enter Merit

Merit. Shall I prevail with you, sir, to do the office of a father upon this occasion?

Franklyn. With all my heart, sir.

Alison. Hah, hah, young stripling, are you our bold adventurer? A little of my advice, younker, would do you no harm, I believe, — soft and fair, — take care of your constitution. Matrimony is a lasting entertainment... (*Exit Merit*) This is very hard upon your order, Father Doublechin, — mere tantalization — to see matrimony so often before your eyes, yet never to have it in your power to taste it. But “stolen fruit, stolen fruit” ah, Father Doublechin.

Enter Merit leading Florinda; she starts back in surprise

Florinda. (*aside*) Ha! My father! I am undone.

Franklyn. Florinda! hurry durry! What is the matter now? (*aside*) Death! this is all trick and banter.

Merit. (*aside*) My too much care hath betrayed me.

Alison. Hey-day! what, are we all knocked in the head at once? Come, you hoary-pate there, deliver up your charge. And you Mr. Sanctity, make haste and do your office: young folks are impatient.

Franklyn. What wind, in the name of fury, blew you hither, wench?

Florinda. Oh, sir, had not you thus timely interposed, I had been utterly lost.

Franklyn. (*to Merit*) By your leave, sir. This, (*gives her to Doggrell*) Frank, is my daughter. How, girl? What, without your father’s consent? But I hope, the rogue hath not begun at the fag end of the ceremony.

Alison. Lookye, shaver, we will sometime or other enjoy our own choice; and if we cannot procure it in a husband, i’fackins, we will make it up in a gallant. How, in the name of Cupid, can you balk so handsome a young fellow? Come hither, stripling, show your shapes and walk gracefully... see, how portly he plants himself... ah, rogue!

Franklyn. Hark ye, fellow, what pretensions had you to seduce my child, hah?

Merit. Your daughter, sir, is still in your own disposal; and I only made use of this device to ask your consent.

Franklyn. A very pretty excuse! Old birds are not caught with chaff, friend. You are a fine hoity-toity thing, I perceive. I'll warrant, I secure you, madam, from any further excursions.

Florinda. He stole me, sir, threatened me, and would have forced me to his arms. And what, alas! can a weak woman do?

Merit. (*aside*) What does she drive at by all this? How easy she seems under this disappointment! Ah, woman, woman!

Franklyn. Well, child, however... since he has set agog your inclinations, you shall not want a husband. This worthy gentleman is of my providing. Let us have no hums nor haws, nor fiddle-faddle consideration. Come, Father Doublechin, and you there, Mr. Kidnapper, now tis your turn to be witness.

Doggrell. Let us first, sir, be assured that the lady has not disposed of herself: perhaps we may now be invading another gentleman's property.

Franklyn. Has a thief a property in stolen goods, because he hath them in possession?

Florinda. My duty, sir, obliges me to comply with your commands, but, pray sir, grant me some small time to recover my fright. My spirits are so disordered that I cannot support myself. (*faints*)

Franklyn. What, I'll warrant, the terrible shape of father put you in this consternation, hussy.

Alison. Poor girl, poor girl! here, child, drink a little of my cordial, a little of my cordial. (*drinks herself*) This is the life and soul of a traveller. (*sings*)

Then who would not be a bride,

Then who would not be a bride,

For the sweetest kiss,

Is not half of her bliss:

This all will say, — who have tried.

Franklyn. A husband is the best physic for her! And though, like all other doses, it may seem nauseous at first, yet I'll warrant she'll like the operation. Come, come, marry her, boy, and write thy own epitalmum.

Doggrell. Epithalamium, sir.

Alison. What, marry her to a poet! The jingle of love in a copy of verses will never answer a wife's expectation. Besides, poverty is the mere bane of love.

Franklyn. But Mr. Doggrell, they tell me, writes only for his diversion, nay, he pays the bookseller for printing his works, and writes the most like a gentleman of any man on this side Parnassus.

Doggrell. Your father, madam, does me too much honour. But no poet ever celebrates his wife: the word "wife," methinks, has as ill a sound in poetry as in the mouth of a husband.

Franklyn. Hark ye, you woman-stealer, you had best withdraw, lest I let loose my indignation upon you, and send you to the gallows, to give Mr. Doggrell here a subject for an elegy.

Doggrell. D'Ogrelle, I beseech you, sir.

Merit. (*aside*) Sure this is the most malicious adventure that ever crossed an unfortunate Lover. (*Exit*)

Doublechin. After supper, you may command me, sir; for if you can live upon love, good people, tis what one of my substance cannot so easily subsist upon.

Franklyn. Well, compose yourself, girl; Mr. Doggrell, she is your charge.

Doggrell. (*leading her off*) Madam,

To your relief your ardent lover flies.
Ah! those attractive lips, and dear deluding eyes!

Exeunt

Act II. Scene I.

Scene Continues.

Enter Doggrell and Florinda.

Doggrell. I vow, madam, to consider your beauty and pedigree together, you are just like a rose grafted on a thorn. That was a most egregious wrong step of your father's.

Florinda. My father, tis true, with all the inconsideration of youth, married merely for love—an action, I must own, unbecoming a gentleman.

Doggrell. The chief end of matrimony, I conceive, is the support of a family, and the increase of an estate: but so many graces, madam—so many charms!—will overbalance a small defect of genealogy.

Florinda. Then I have the misfortune, sir, to be so extremely like my mother, that upon all occasions my presence gives a hint to reflection. (*aside*) Now, will I work him into a dislike of me by seeming to strike in with his humour.

Doggrell. An unhappiness, indeed, madam: love generally proves an edged tool to an old man's fingers.

Florinda. This error of my father will make me in every respect submit myself to his pleasure, to avoid the like inconvenience myself.

Doggrell. (*aside*) Let me die, if she does not seem fond of me.

Florinda. To convince you, sir, that I scorn to act dishonourably with a gentleman of your merit, I ought to acquaint you with another disgrace, that a slip of one of my ancestors entailed upon the family; but should my father know—

Doggrell. Nay, madam, I am as secret as a confessor as I am a man of honour.

Florinda. My great-great-grandfather, sir—

Doggrell. What of him, madam?

Florinda. Was... hanged... sir.

Doggrell. Hanged! (*aside*) and I will follow his example sooner than marry into a family made up of knaves and fools!

Florinda. I entreat you, sir, ask me no further: it is mighty hard, methinks, that an ancestor's failings should devolve upon his posterity.

Doggrell. So that, madam, your father's indiscretion will grace my coat with a spit, and your great-great-grandfather's slip, as your ladyship terms it, blazon my scutcheon with a gallows. Ha, ha, ha.

(Enter Antony and William at a distance)

Antony. Lookye there, yonder she is, i'faith... softly, softly William... swop upon en at once, knock en dawn, and I will secure young mistress.

William. But what shall we do with the plaguy toad when we have caught en? Is it not a hanging matter, Antony? Thee understand'st the law to be sure, who canst read the statute book, and draw out leases for maaster. Sbud, tis a rare thing to be lornèd.

Antony. We must first and foremost enquire, whether or no a dafter be goods and chattels, William. In the next place, d'ye see, whether or no, she stole he, or he stole she; but according to the best of my reading, it seems plainly to be a ravishment — but stay, let us catch en first! Lay hold of his pitch-frog William, for all these swaggering blades' courage lies within-side the scabbard.

William. Hoh, hoh, sir, as flat as a flounder, by George, (*trips up Doggrell's heels*) A cord, a cord, Antony! Lookye, sir, we kill foxes for making bold with our geese, and hang dogs for choking our sheep, and i'faith, I'll make thee an example to all fortune stealers. What, is maaster's only chick a bit for your chaps, sirrah?

Doggrell. Pray, gentlemen, my money is at your service; but I entreat you, gentlemen, spare my life, for that fair lady's repose. May I be informed of the occasion of this assault? Or are you officers of the law? At whose suit, gentlemen?

Antony. Lookye, William, I find it plainly to be a hanging matter, d'ye see, for lookye, d'ye see, thoff stealing of a woman should be no felony, we can indict en for stealing the rigging and appurtenances, d'ye see, as in the first place, William. Item, for stealing of mistress's head-gear, with all the dangling ribbons, lace, &c. thereunto belonging; a silk gown and petticoat, and all mistress's wearing apparel, d'ye see; for thoff a jury, perhaps, would not bring in the bare woman above the value of ten pence, yet the clothing, William...

William. Always reckoned the chiefest part of a woman: as plain as a pike-staff, as clear as the sun, Antony.

Florinda. Pray, treat the gentleman with more civility. What brought you hither, Antony?

Antony. Oh, mistress, mistress! You left the whole house at home in a most pitiful taking! For my own part, I had rather have lost the best wether of all the flock, than such a mishap should have happened to the family.

William. To be plain with you, forsooth, a woman costs a hugeous deal the rearing, and we could never have answered such a loss to maaster, forsooth.

Doggrell. Upon my honour, gentlemen—

Florinda. They are my father's servants, sir; you are in no danger. (*aside*) But I shall not endeavour wholly to undeceive them, since their care in confining him may possibly set me at liberty.

Doggrell. Downright barbarity, I vow!

William. Sbud, chez believe tis ravishment in good earnest, now, for young mistress excuses en hugeous feelingly. But how shall we order matters? I think twill be the safest way to hang up the prisoner to rights, to save the labour of carriage.

Doggrell. I vow gentlemen—I beg you—you mistake the person, I was never, upon my honour, concerned in seducing the young lady! The rusticity of these mortals, madam, leads them into innumerable absurdities.

William. Never talk to us of your nummeribble absuddeties, nor speak your pedlar's-French, d'ye see, to juggle young mistress out of our clutches again, d'ye see... there, there, bind en a little tighter, Antony.

Antony. I cannot well tell whether we can answer hanging of en, or no, but suppose, William, we let en have the honour of dying the death of a gentleman, and we kill en in a duel. I

have heard say, that is but manslaughter, if the worst come to the worst. Hah, hah! (*makes passes at a distance*)

Doggrell. As I am a man of honour, I was no way concerned: I appeal to the fair lady, there.

Florinda. Have a care, Antony, this gentleman makes his applications to me, with the approbation of my father.

Antony. Do thou guard the prisoners, d'ye see; here is a Justice, they say, below in the inn: we had best ask his worship's opinion before we kill en outrights, d'ye see. (*going to shut them into a closet together*)

William. Oh, oh, gracious, hold, hold! Let us never pen them in together! Why, slife, man, that is the main way to become accessaries ourselves.

Antony. Why, ods-my-life, mistress, do but let maaster know that your mouth begins to water after man, and my life of it he will never starve the cause.

Enter Franklyn and Doublechin

William. Oh dear, maaster, maaster, we were all like to come to a most lamentable mishap—young mistress, forsooth—'slidikins, I am overjoyed to see you—'sbud, who thought to have found your worship's good grace here! But as I was saying, young mistress, forsooth, took it in her head to run astray, and faith, was stole—or else laid the moveable in the thief's way, forsooth.

Antony. Oh, sir, oh dear sir, the house at home is in a most piteous taking; we rose all the whole parish, as a body may say, and sent all the labourers abroad, east, west, north, and south.

Franklyn. Hold, hold Antony! I know of my daughter's proceedings.

Antony. See how the plaguy toad looks: here is a maaster's honour here for you now, Mr. Brazenface.

Franklyn. You are under a mistake, Antony. Unbind the gentleman: but however, I cannot but commend your diligence. I hope Frank, you will excuse the ignorance of these fellows.

William. Under a mistake, Antony, under a mistake: dost hear?

Antony. Aye, under a mistake, under a mistake.

Exeunt Antony and William

Franklyn. Well, damsel, are your spirits in tune yet? And how stand your inclinations affected, honest Frank? Only give the word boy, and Father Doublechin shall secure you in a more pleasing bondage. I will warrant my girl shall do her duty: what say you damsel? Come Father Doublechin, you should never let love or a good dinner cool, for want of your assistance.

Doggrell. Matrimony throws one at once off from the conversation of the *beau monde*. A husband among them is neither allowed to be handsome, well bred, or witty. He loses all his former *politesse* with his liberty— (*aside*) but then again my undervaluing my family lays me open to satire; and when the ladies are out of hope their tongues are under no restraint.

Franklyn. Why Frank: what, still shall-I shall-I? Is this owing to your behaviour Mistress Contradiction? Come, hussy, show what a dutiful wife you will make by your obedience to your father.

Florinda. I am entirely at your disposal, sir! (*aside*) I may now safely venture to consent without running the risk of his compliance.

Franklyn. Here is a glorious girl for you, Frank! Come, Father Doublechin, all parties are now agreed.

Doggrell. I must confess, sir, the lady's merits are beyond all dispute: but your dishonourable proceedings, sir, have put a stop to the progress of my *amour*.

Franklyn. My dishonourable proceedings, Frank?

Doggrell. I am not to be imposed upon, sir, in a thing that so nearly concerns my posterity.

Franklyn. What, still upon the old string? Ah, Frank, Frank, that love can never be sincere that raises so many objections.

Doggrell. Think of your great-grandfather, sir

Franklyn. He was a gentleman every inch of him; married into the family of Sir Thomas Pedigree! And I will warrant you, he could trace out his genealogy for two or three hundred years beyond the conquest.

Doggrell. When I find myself once imposed upon, I always distrust the same person in his whole proceedings. Who was your great-grandfather's physician, sir, during his last sickness?

Franklyn. Come, come Frank, never endeavour to perplex the matter. These poets talk so allegorically, there is no understanding them. We never had one of our generation prescribed to death, nor spoiled the breed of our family with boluses, pills and purges; we never had any physician belonging to our house but nature, nor any distemper but age.

Doggrell. Tis more honourable to die by the hands of the physician than the hangman, sir.

Franklyn. True, Frank, you may plead the custom of the world for it. But dying is dying, and I believe dead men make but small difference between poison and a halter. Here, Father Doublechin, I join them together, now do you clap on the matrimonial yoke.

Doggrell. Sir, I return the present; the lady is too deserving of me, and so corrupt a family.

Franklyn. Oh, these wicked weeds, poetry and genealogy, have quite overgrown poor Frank's understanding: thou a poet!

Doggrell. Did not I check my anger by the dictates of philosophy, I should let loose my resentment! But, however, sir, to let you see that I scorn to be a bubble, I cannot help showing you that I am acquainted with the secret history of your family, sir. I know, that your worship made an alliance with a lady of the kitchen, and that your great-grandfather, sir, made his exit on the gallows. You are my guardian, tis true, sir, and have my fortune in your possession, but not in your disposal.

Franklyn. Heighday! What, in a passion, Frank? balk my daughter, and belie my ancestors? Come, come, come, girl.

Exeunt Franklyn, Doublechin and Florinda

Enter Alison

Alison. Well, honest heart, my bonny champion, beware head, old boy, for i'faith I design to throw the stocking — pure rosy cheeks, ruby lips, and a rolling eye! A most glorious girl! Worth a man's pawning his liberty.

Doggrell. The match is entirely her father's proposal, madam, not my inclinations.

Alison. Tis only people of ordinary fashion that nowadays marry for love. Your men of quality, I know, marry one, and love another, but idad, tis a most confounded expensive way, tis this occasions so many divorces, and separate beds, and lays the charge of keeping on a family.

Doggrell. Oh the charming nun! Your interest, madam, might assist a desponding lover, and at the same time relieve a most beautiful lady from confinement.

Alison. Very hard upon the young lady, I vow: disappoint her lover, and afterwards leave her in the lurch! Drive the ox from the manger without ever designing to taste the hay! and what— I'll warrant, young spindle-shanks, you take me for an o-l-d woman now, that hath lost all relish; only fit to set young folks together, and think of times past.

Doggrell. I beg your pardon, madam; your complexion, tis true, seems a little to confute your airy temper. I vow, madam, you have a world of vivacity.

Alison. What! make me undergo the fatigue without hope of sharing the diversion?

Doggrell. I beg your pardon, madam, you might command me in an office of the like nature.

Alison. Say'st thou so, my lad? Wilt thou do a good turn for receiving one? I have a few wrinkles, tis true, contracted in my virginity and widowhood — but matrimony would soon smooth and polish my countenance again. Believe me, sir, there is not a greater impairer of beauty, than the longing of a virgin, and the tedious expectation of a widow. Why, who wears worse than your old maid, sir?

Doggrell. You speak with a wonderful deal of judgment, madam. I am informed she is a lady of quality: will you oblige me, madam, so far as to convey my sighs to the fair lady, and do me the friendly office of a zephyr.

Alison. (*aside*) Poor fellow! thou thinkest to make me only auxiliary, but i'faith, I'll lay ten to one, I'll make myself principal in the end.

Doggrell. A billet, madam.

Alison. Send her a kiss, boy: there is some savour in such a present, and it brings some benefit to the bearer too.

Doggrell. Nay, madam, I shall tell her in the epistle that I desire to kiss her fair hands.

Alison. That is mere throwing away a kiss; come, come, stripling, ladies know that the lips were made for kissing.

Doggrell. You must know, madam, that I dedicate my vacant hours to the Muses; and always write to the ladies in verse. The sentiments of love glide so smoothly into a lady's heart, set off with the ornaments of poetry, that before they are acquainted with the person, they are in love with the poet.

Alison. But the kiss, Mr. D'Ogrelle.

Doggrell. Tis at your service, madam (*kisses her*) but we never send so rude a present to the ladies.

Alison. Ah! again, my bonny hero, (*kisses him*) I shall now speak most pathetically in thy commendation. Never fear, my lad, I owe Cupid some good turns for past services, I'll bring you together, and my life for it, she'll never be able to resist so charming a gentleman.

Doggrell. You are mighty obliging, madam; beauty warms the poet's imagination, and love is the very food of wit. I have known a gentleman, that could not read a couplet with juster emphasis than a parish clerk, write very prettily upon his mistress's eyes. I have at least celebrated above fifty ladies *pour passer le temps*, which I call love *ouvertures*. A lady of quality cannot pull off a glove and display a beautiful little finger, but it immediately flows into a

sonnet. A lady's dress, a random glance, or a new suit of ribbons are occasions that inspire a man of the least gallantry with the brightest turns of fancy.

Alison. A sure way, sir, to attack the whole sex at once. And that man must take very bad aim, who shoots amongst a whole flock and brings off none of the game.

Doggrell. Oh charming nun!

Alison. Come on then, young Ovid, out with it! *extempore* now.

Doggrell. "Oh charming Nun of noble race" — no, no, hold: "of noble *line*." — But an affair of this nature requires more serious application. So madam, I shall beg leave to retire a moment or two to adjust my thoughts with more regularity. (*Exit*)

Alison. A handsome young fellow, with little wit and a good stock of vanity. Why, what then! He hath a good comfortable proverb of his side, and have at him. I'faith, I, a match-maker, quotha! No, I thank my stars, I am not as yet of so cold a constitution to look on with indifference! A match-maker, idad, in other terms, is nothing else but a lawful pimp. (*Exit*)

Enter Merit

Merit. Accuse me! Promise obedience! Throw herself under her father's protection! All my hopes are grounded on her sex, for nature teaches them dissimulation. A woman often smiles on the man she hates, and frowns on him she loves.

Enter a Drawer

Drawer. Coming, coming, sir.

Merit. Hold, hold, sirrah: where do you carry that wine?

Drawer. Coming, coming, gentlemen! Into the Dragon, sir, — I'll bring your honour a pint of the same immediately—coming, coming, sir—score a quart of sack in the Dragon, below there.

Merit. Here's money for you, sirrah. (*gives him money*)

Drawer. Coming, coming—I humbly thank your honour, your honour may take my word for the matter—Betty is as tight and wholesome a girl as any in all the neighbourhood. You shall treat with her yourself—coming, coming, gentlemen.

Merit. How readily the rogue answers in his profession! Betty may tonight oblige another customer, I want none of your pimping tricks, sirrah, only lend me your apron and cap, tarry in the next room, and let me serve the company where you were going.

Drawer. With all my heart, sir, here's my apron. Make haste, sir, or ten to one you'll have your head broke for my delay.

Merit. Come, come, the cap, the cap.

Knocking heard

Drawer. Coming, coming, sir! Plague of your impatience—a damned choleric old chuff, I'll warrant ye; he has a most confounded passionate knock; there is nothing discovers a man's temper more than his manner in knocking—coming, coming, sir. A fine gentleman, I see, will upon occasion make a good smart sort of a drawer, here, here nimbly, and away.

Merit. Why don't you bawl, sirrah? D'ye hear? Bawl, you dog! Come, come, the wine, and the glasses.

Drawer. Coming, coming, sir — there, there, away, away. (*gives him the bottle and glasses*)

Merit. Coming, coming, gentlemen. (*Exit*)

Drawer. Tis a sad life that we gentlemen drawers must submit to. We are mere spaniels, brought under command by the discipline of the cane: the smart fellows at our expense give the first proofs of their courage, and we very often stand the spleen of a losing gamester. A drawer may be said to be thoroughly qualified, when he can lie with a good grace, pimp dextrously, be scoundrelled without grumbling, and bear a beating with patience. (*Exit*)

Scene draws, and discovers Franklyn's apartment. Franklyn, Florinda and Doublechin; to them enter Merit, as the Drawer.

Merit. Coming, coming, sir.

Franklyn. No attendance to be had here! No Attendance!

Merit. A choice flower, your worship, as rich a pipe as ever was brought from the Canaries, (*pouring out sack*) broached on purpose for your honour, mere amber.

Franklyn. I'll amber you, you dog you, you villain, you rascal; what, must we tarry here all night, you scoundrel, to wait your pleasure? Let me go, Father, that I may thrash the dog into better manners. Make a gentleman wait your pleasure, sirrah! — but hold, I had best let him alone, for who knows but the dog may poison me in my sack.

Merit. I only stayed, your honour, to broach a fresh pipe. I'll warrant the wine pleases your worship.

Doublechin. Keep your temper, Mr. Franklyn, the lad speaks well. Keep your temper; come, come, a glass will reconcile matters, and make us all friends: fill about, boy.

Franklyn. A rogue, a dog, a downright wenching house by the attendance! Sirrah, I could find in my heart —

Doublechin. Never lie at his mercy, Mr. Franklyn... he may poison you — who knows, he may — aye, he may poison you — (*drinks*) I vow, a most delicious flavour! Fill the angry gentleman a glass, sirrah, the other glass, my lad, and then I'll venture to pass my judgment. Come, sir, my service to you: here's your daughter's inclinations. (*drinks*) Come, come, sir, drink and be easy.

Franklyn. Lookye, Father, your drinking after that extravagant rate is the ready way to lighten the bottle, but not my afflictions.

Florinda. (*aside*) How every dress becomes him!

Franklyn. As you say, Father, the wine passes (*drinks*) neat and clean off the palate. Go, sirrah, fill the girl there a glass — never fear, child. (*Doublechin holds Merit*) I'll warrant, Frank will come to at last. But who can suffer all these affronts? Balk my daughter, and abuse my family?

Doublechin. Why, you relapse, sir! Here, you *Hic & Ubique*, fill t'other glass to Mr. Franklyn. This, sir, will inspire you with good humour. Come, sir, here is to your daughter's happy conjunction. (*drinks*)

Franklyn. Pox on it, as long as the bottle holds, we shall have nothing but the glass and your lips in conjunction. Stay, hold, Father, spare the wine and your compliments a little, I beg you. Sirrah, did not I order you to fill to my daughter?

Merit. (*aside to Florinda*) Oh, my Florinda! may I hope you are constant? How could you quit me with so much disdain! and fly with pleasure to my rival's arms?

Florinda. (*aside to Merit*) You wrong me, sir, I am and ever will be constant. I feigned obedience, and looked with indifference on you, only to avoid suspicion.

Franklyn. Heigh day! what is to be done here!

Florinda. (*to Merit aloud*) See the sheets are well aired, d'ye hear me. (*to Franklyn*) I think, sir, you are apt to take cold on the road.

Franklyn. Set down the bottle, rogue, and about your business. But, Father Doublechin, let me tell you, these objections of Mr. Doggrell look shrewdly suspicious. Tax my family with the gallows, a rogue! A downright poetical fiction!

Florinda. (*aside to Merit*) My seeming fondness towards him, chills his love: a lover that makes an easy conquest despises his victory.

Franklyn. What a vengeance, now we have as much plague to get rid of you, as we had to bring you hither: and the dog hath the impudence to be in close conference with my daughter!

Merit. Shall I order the chamberlain to call your worship in the morning? All the rooms are ready: you, sir, I think lie in the Mairmaid, you in the Dolphin, and your ladyship —

Franklyn. Hold sirrah, her ladyship shall be disposed of as I think fit! Fetch me the key of her apartment, d'ye hear. I'll allow of no such private caballing. About your business, sirrah!

Doublechin. Come, wash off the remains of your peevish humour with a glass of sack, sir. See here sir, the very look of it brightens a man's countenance! Come, madam, here is a health to your lover. (*drinks*)

Merit. My master, sir, has three pipes of this same wine, neat as it came over, of the true natural flavour, without the least adulteration. (*aside to Florinda*) I'll watch every motion, and be always ready, my dearest creature, to fly to your relief.

Florinda. (*aside to Merit*) The first favourable opportunity you may expect me.

Franklyn. See the impudence of this rogue. What, still there, sirrah? Away, carry the remainder of the bottle into my daughter's chamber. I'll conduct her thither.

Merit. Coming, coming, gentlemen. (*Exit*)

Franklyn. An impudent coxcomb! Come daughter, tonight you are under my protection, tomorrow you shall be under your husband's protection: while the steed is safe is the time to secure the door! Frank, you will find, upon a night's consideration, will be convinced of his folly. Tomorrow morning, Father.

Doublechin. I'll attend you, sir.

Florinda. (*aside*)

Since marriage binds us fast in lasting bands,
Love that unites our hearts, shall join our hands.

Exeunt

Act III. Scene I.

Scene: Lady Myrtilla's apartment.

The Scene draws and discovers Myrtilla leaning on a table, set off with a cake and a bottle of wine: Busie is seated at a distant part of the stage. To them enters Chaucer, places himself at the table, he eats; and drinks to Myrtilla, who continues in silence; he afterwards makes love to her by signs, she still remains in the same posture; Chaucer at last being no longer able to contain himself, rises from the table and advances towards her with the profoundest respect, and kneeling at her feet thus accosts her in a tragic strain.

Chaucer.

Since the kind stars to mutual love constrain,
Why should the tongue conceal our secret pain?
Was it for this, inexorable fair,
Your magic drew me through the distant air?
Though some cursed charm your wonted speech denies,
At least shed pity from those radiant eyes,
And look me into hope.

In short, madam, you see destiny will have it so; and we have nothing else to do but submit. Come, come, madam, let us delay no time, the yoke of matrimony sets best upon young shoulders. Since the tongue is upon the reserve, let us make use of the lovers' language, and interpret by the eyes;

We from the ladies' eyes our fate may learn,
And in those glasses love or hate discern.

What, both your tongue and eyes under command? Let me die if I do not think you the only lady in Christendom that hath either of them in her power! I vow, madam, you have an exquisite pretty hand, so finely turned— (*he offers to take her by the hand, she shrieks and runs out of the room*)

Busie. Go, you unthinking creature, you— you forgot you was a spirit!

Chaucer. That is true, as you say, child: my love is not so spiritual as it should be. But, pox on't, the flesh has so much interest in this whimsical passion, that it will be meddling, spite of one's teeth.

Busie. Why, you should not have spoken one syllable, much less have offered to touch her.

Chaucer. We lovers are generally guilty of most egregious blunders. How could any mortal think to gain upon a woman by silence? For the man that talks much among them, is always esteemed pretty conversation.

Busie. Hark! what noise is that? As I am alive, all the whole house is alarmed; we are utterly undone, Mr. Chaucer; you will lose your mistress, I shall lose my service, and my lady will lose her reputation. What shall we do? where will you hide yourself?

Chaucer. Lookye, Mistress Busie, though we have unhappily involved ourselves in this difficulty, we will not give up the cause. A good steady assurance may still carry on the deceit. For my part, I'll play the apparition in my exit, and vanish; do you try, for once, whether a woman can feign fear as well as sorrow. Look astonished, and say you neither saw nor heard anything, but observed the candle burn blue, and smelt brimstone most intolerably: superstition, my dear, is very credulous.

Exit Chaucer

Enter Myrtilla and Alison

Myrtilla. Oh, dear madam, I was so extremely frightened! Your good nature, I hope, will excuse this disturbance.

Alison. What is the matter, precious, has love committed burglary, and broke into thy chamber? Ah rogue! He is a sly young thief, and very seldom comes honestly by his possessions.

Myrtilla. Hold— ah! there he is

Alison. What— where— where is he?

Myrtilla. I beg your pardon madam, it hath made so deep an impression on me, that fancy recalls my fears.

Alison. Do you see now, my dear? These are some of the scarecrows that attend virginity; just my case when I was a maid, as I hope for a helpmate; why, I lived upon fancy, and my whole life was made up of inconsistencies. I sighed for I could not tell what, was wondrous fanciful in my dreams, and was not a little whimsical too when I was awake.

Myrtilla. Busie!

Busie. Madam.

Myrtilla. Where do you run? Where are you? Why do you leave me? There is more vexation with these creatures: I vow, tis intolerable.

Busie. I imagined, by your ladyship's looks, that you was taken with an hysteric fit, or surprised by the vapours. But when I heard you shriek so lamentably, bless me, I thought I should have sunk in the place!

Myrtilla. You saw him, I suppose, Busie.

Busie. What, Madam?

Myrtilla. The apparition.

Busie. I neither saw nor heard anything, but was frighted to that degree—

Myrtilla. Tis mighty strange.

Busie. The candle, I perceived, appeared more than ordinary bluish, and I was almost suffocated with brimstone.

Alison. The very downright symptoms of a spirit! A spirit as certainly attacks your nostrils with the fumes of sulphur as a beau with a digestion of a civet. I think I do smell it... yes, yes, I do smell it.

Myrtilla. You seem to be frightened.

Alison. Frightened, quotha! No, no, madam, I have, thanks to experience, seen spirits of all shapes, and all countries. Why, a Jerusalem spirit is no more like an English spirit than a hog is like a rhinoceros. I have been witness of all the devil's frolics— idad, to my certain knowledge, he makes nothing of unfurnishing a kitchen to entertain himself with a country-dance of dishes and platters; many be the times and often, he has rattled my curtains, and made the bed shake under me, when I have not had the comfort of a bedfellow; many a dark night have I seen

the headless horse, and have had the honour to converse with the Queen of the Fairies. (*looking towards the table*) Hah, hah, damsel! Cake and a bottle! Heighday! And St. Agnes's Night too! Are you thereabouts, girl? 'Twas a ghost I perceive of your own raising, my dear, ha, ha, ha.

Myrtilla. Your contradicting my former fortune, madam, drew me in to commit this new piece of folly.

Alison. Come honey, here is his health, with all my heart. (*sings*)
The maiden and the bachelor,
 Pardie! are simple elves,
And till they grow to man and wife,
 Know nothing of themselves.

Then since we're each other's by nature designed
 Let's unite, and our knowledge improve;
Here's a health to the lass that is passively kind,
 And the youth that is active in love.

(*drinks*) Sheartlikins, madam, the very expectation has embellished your physiognomy; then what may we not hope from the possession? Tell me now, honey, did not his appearance make the blood shoot through your veins, and tickle your heart's root?

Myrtilla. The gentleman, I confess ingenuously, is the most my aversion of all the whole sex; and I cannot imagine how the fellow can have the impudence to make his applications so much above his condition.

Busie. The gentleman, madam, may, perhaps, balance those defects by some other extraordinary qualities.

Myrtilla. I tell you, I hate the fellow mortally: this impertinence does not become you, Mistress Pert.

Alison. Just the quaint whim of the whole sex, by St. Thomas of Kent, always to reject the thing that offers itself, and be ever hankering after and craving for the thing that is denied them.

Myrtilla. Sure I am destined to misfortune; why had I not retired, and never revived this tormenting fellow in my imagination?

Alison. Why, what are your objections now, chicken: is he old, forsooth?

Myrtilla. No.

Alison. Then have at him, i'faith, my sweeting. Youth is a sauce that will make almost any husband go down. Ah *benedicite!* Youth! Golden days, and love in abundance! The spring of life, and Cupid's harvest! Here is a constitution, madam, that wears like the never-fading laurel, that even flourishes in the very winter of age. My conscience, tis very hard that you should not know the true uses of youth, till tis out of your power to enjoy it.

Myrtilla. Do you believe, madam, that I must inevitably submit myself to this fortune?

Alison. Here are two husbands you see. (*looking on her hand*) Marry tonight, make haste and love this same to death, to make room for the second. Come, come, child, he is handsome that handsome does, and there is no judging of a husband without trial. We can never know a horse's paces by his shapes.

Myrtilla. But perhaps my fancy may have imposed upon me, and this whole scene may be all delusion.

Alison. Try the trick over again, madam; a second view of him I suppose would convince you. Here is in the inn one of the most expert cunning men that ever drew circle. Ah, he is a most rare fellow for consulting the planets. Lookye, bird, if you find him of the same opinion, you must even stick by the bargain, I think, and marry as soon as you can.

Myrtilla. I'll follow your advice, madam. In the morning consult the doctor, and take proper measures accordingly.

Exeunt Myrtilla, Busie and Alison

Scene: The Hall.

Enter Doggrell; to him, enter Alison

Alison. Ha, Ha! old Crambo! The lady is thine own, boy, i'faith.

Doggrell. With what air did she receive the sonnet, madam? Did you mark the rise and fall of her passions at every pause? For I may without vanity affirm that I have a world of the *tendresse* in my performances.

Alison. Slidikins! She received it, my lad, with all the ecstasy that a criminal receives a reprieve. Bless us all, had you but seen her, man! Why twas a perfect charm. The very first couplet made love twinkle in her eyes, the next gave her a languishing air, but as she read on, she was in a downright rapture. As I hope for indulgence, I never saw a poet repeat his own verses with more admiration than she expressed at every line.

Doggrell. Did not her passion, madam, excite her curiosity, and draw her in to ask some questions relating to my person or condition?

Alison. Since we have made this breach in her heart, my lad, there is now no fear of gaining the citadel. Come, come, a woman's love is not so easily quenched neither. Slidikins, the poet knew our temper to a hair, that said:

Women's love is like wild fire

The more it burneth the more it doth desire.

Doggrell. But every little circumstance adds to a lover's satisfaction: did she ask no questions at all, madam?

Alison. Ah rogue! didst thou but know all, thou wouldst envy thy own sonnet. As soon as she had read it, she lifted up her eyes in admiration, clapped it close to her precious lips... and... kissed it... thus... (*kisses him*) again, and again, as eagerly, I warrant you. Harrow and alas, when I was of her years, I could love too by the force of imagination.

Doggrell. An old woman's kisses, to my taste, are like the embraces of a drunkard. But did not her ladyship request my name or character? Or was she only in love with the compliment, without examining into the author of it?

Alison. Why, she asked at least a hundred questions in a breath, and I told her—ah, *benedicite*, what did I not tell her? Ods-my-life, I was almost in love with my own description! I said your shape was of a most curious turn...

Doggrell. You are mighty obliging, madam.

Alison. ...that the vivacity of your wit sparkled in your eyes...

Doggrell. You were too liberal, madam, in my commendation.

Alison. ...that your good nature extended to all mankind but the wits, upon whom, as you are one of the fraternity, you wer obliged to exercise your spleen.

Doggrell. Most extremely complaisant, madam, a mighty fine encomium, I vow. But did not you heighten my character, madam, with an account of my family, which, modestly speaking, is of as great antiquity as the best quality in the universe?

Alison. Slid, I told her everything. But harkye, young madrigal, let us see, I pray you, how do you mean to carry on your approaches now. Come, come, lad, your youth with my experience will go a great way.

Doggrell. The quality, madam, claim just distance and decorum, and a courtship in form. I'll approach her with veneration, and lay my heart at her feet with the profoundest submission.

Alison. Wrong, all wrong, youngster! Why, a lady will hold out a regular courtship, purely upon a *punctilio* of honour. Sdiggers, one of her temper, like a widow, must be carried by storm. Never stand upon decency and cringes, boy! Pour a volley of love at once upon her ladyship at the first onset, and, my life for the matter, she will soon come to capitulation.

Doggrell. But her ladyship, perhaps, from so rash an attempt will be apt to conclude that for want of good sense I was forced in the vulgar way of the world to call in impudence to my assistance.

Alison. Ah boy! there is not so winning a card to be played as assurance. Sheartlikins, a young fellow with this rhetoric will make a palpable absurdity pass among the females for a current piece of wit, will convert ill manners into a jest, and laugh downright rudeness into a piece of gallantry.

Doggrell. But, madam, may I be so happy as to hope for an interview? Will her ladyship condescend to afford me the sweet melody of her conversation? But I fear my natural bashfulness, madam—

Alison. Pish! a fig for bashfulness, say I. Raise your courage with a glass of wine, my lad, this secret hour of the night favours you. Lady Myrtilia will expect you here this instant: go, boy, brighten thy understanding, and return with vigour to the place of assignation.

Doggrell. May my love, madam, be shipwrecked on the quicksands of inconstancy, if I know how to return this obligation.

Alison. I vow, Mr. D'Ogrelle, you are a wonderful pretty gentleman.

Doggrell. You betray your judgment mightily, madam. Ha, ha, ha!

Alison. Courage then, my young hero! Come, come, my presence shall never spoil your proceedings in your *amour*: I'll leave you together.

Doggrell. I'll retire for a moment or two, to whet the edge of my wit with your prescription, madam, just study a few fine things to open the conference. Madam, your civilities extend beyond measure. I am your most obedient, humble servant.

Exeunt severally

Enter Chaucer and Busie

Chaucer. Well, my pretty rogue, and what says Lady Myrtilia?

Busie. She hates you.

Chaucer. Does she so? Why then, I think, she must even fling herself into matrimony, like the ladies that marry for a jointure, and run the risk of loving. Well, my little engineer, you must direct my approaches, who best know the weakest part of the fortress.

Busie. She interprets the whole affair most maliciously, and that which we would have her believe the will of the fates, she throws wholly upon the strength of her imagination. She

distrusts her own senses, and hath prevailed with herself, that the whole scene was mere delusion.

Chaucer. Pox on it, why was I such a fool as to be in love? But, Mistress Busie, is she positively resolved against me?

Busie. I thought you were too well acquainted with our sex to dread a woman's resolutions, and especially in love affairs. However, sir, we are not yet quite desperate. My lady was informed of a fortune-teller now in the inn, whom she fully designs to consult in the morning, and if she can suit his description to your person, tis my opinion you may still be the happy man.

Chaucer. Say'st thou so, my dear girl? Then, faith, it shall go hard but I'll be beforehand with her, and make my appearance once again without the help of magic.

Busie. I vow, and protest, sir, my lady's love is a mere false appetite; she seems as if she always had a good stomach, yet will never fall to, when there is a good dish set before her. Make but Doctor Astrolabe your friend, Mr. Chaucer, and you may assure yourself of my lady's compliance.

Chaucer. Well, my dear, I thank thee for all thy good offices, and wish thee a good night. (*kisses her*)

Busie. Oh, fie, sir— I shall rob my lady— ha, ha, ha— of her property.

Chaucer. I only stay my stomach, child, since Lady Myrtilia has thought fit to defer the entertainment. Good night, my dear.

Exeunt severally

Enter Alison in a nun's habit. She lifts up her veil, and walks about the stage

Alison. What is bred in the bone, I find, will never out of the flesh. Alack, and well-a-day! that ever love was sin, say I. Inclination, I perceive, does not only float in youthful veins. A fine world, truly! to banter us out of the comforts of life, and persuade us out of the most pleasing of our senses! No, i'fackins, I shall not, at this time of day, let the world be judge of my constitution, which, i'troth, has worn out two brace and a half of brave jolly husbands already. Yet I still dare venture on t'other matrimonial voyage— but hold, I must now suit my conversation to the formality of my habit. (*lowers her veil*)

Enter Doggrell

Doggrell. Fair lady, show yourself a generous conqueror; and since I am taken captive by your charms, and bound in the golden chains of your beauty, throw me not into the dungeon of disdain, but rather confine me in the pleasing mansions of your bosom; where my heart will glory in its captivity, and despise the less substantial joys of liberty.

Alison. These fine things might ensnare a heart disposed to love, but you are sensible, sir, I have already devoted mine to another service. You men of wit are general lovers of the whole sex, and think to try the strength of every lady's resolutions at the small expense of a sonnet. Come, sir: I know poets and knights errant can never subsist without a mistress, for love is as well a spur to wit as valour.

Doggrell. You are the centre of my love, madam, which like my poetry is founded on the basis of eternity; we are, it must be acknowledged, madam, like knights errant devoted to the

service of the fair, but still, like them, we have but one peerless beauty, one bright star of angelical virtues, where we pay adoration. (*aside*) A more alert behaviour is the only lure to make her stoop to my addresses. (*to Alison*) Let me die, madam, if I don't think you a very pretty creature.

Alison. Do you so, sir?

Doggrell. (*offers to lift up her veil*) Come, madam, let this malicious cloud no longer eclipse the sunshine of your beauty. Ah those eyes!

Alison. Desist, I beg you; these liberties do not become you, sir.

Doggrell. I vow and protest, madam, you are most extremely beautiful! Lookye, madam, I quarter as many coats as any gentleman whatever; my estate is by no means despicable; as for my person, and other intrinsic merits, I leave them to the mercy of your ladyship's judgment.

Alison. I must confess, I entertain a good opinion of you, sir, and think you very deserving.

Doggrell. Your ladyship does me too much honour. But what think you, madam, could you like me for a husband?

Alison. A very blunt question!

Doggrell. But a very sincere one, madam.

Alison. You railly very severely, sir.

Doggrell. No, I vow and protest, madam, by these dear yielding lips, I swear, (*kisses her*) by your bright eyes, that odorous balmy breath, and by the bloom that smiles upon your cheeks, by those white teeth, that grace your pretty mouth, like rows of oriental pearl—

Alison. (*aside*) Let me die, if I have ever a one in my head, but what I am obliged to the operator for! Ah, imagination! true is the proverb i' fackins all cats are grey, when light is away.

Doggrell. Nay, by all your charms, I swear, I'll dedicate myself entire to your service, will sacrifice my liberty to matrimony, and—

Alison. Hold, sir make no further protestations! Perform what you have already promised, and no lady whose thoughts are bent that way can dislike you for a husband.

Doggrell. Nay, even my muse, madam, shall be subservient to your commands. I'll turn my panegyric into satire; and your resentment shall have the pleasure to see all those ladies lampooned, that I formerly celebrated.

Alison. We women, sir, naturally fly to extremes, but methinks from a nunnery to a husband is too great a transition! But I must beg your pardon, it grows late.

Doggrell. Will your ladyship grant me the honour of your hand, and shall I be so happy, madam, as to conduct you to your apartment?

Alison. I fear you will be rude, sir; and how shall I, that dare not trust myself abroad in the world, with safety venture a young handsome gentleman in my bed-chamber?

Doggrell. You may confide in my behaviour, madam, I shall presume to take no liberties but will be agreeable.

Alison. (*aside*)

Beauty, like colour, owes itself to light;
For youth and age boast equal charms by night;
And we can still please every sense... but sight.

Exeunt, Doggrell leading Alison

Act IV. Scene I.

Scene: Doctor Astrolabe's Chamber.

Enter Chaucer to Astrolabe

Astrolabe. I beg, sir, you would not intrude upon my studies; I am at present unravelling a great lady's nativity; and cannot as yet attend your questions.

Chaucer. My affair, sir, requires dispatch. Lookye, Doctor, here are three broad pieces for you, I suppose these will disentangle you a moment or two.

Astrolabe. I am willing to oblige as far as lies in the circumference of my power, and especially a person that appears and speaks so much like a gentleman as yourself. Propose your question, and if it lies within the compass of lawful art.

Chaucer. My case, Doctor, is not in the common road. I do not want to be assured of the happiness of life, or the health of an absent friend; I neither desire to have a thief described, nor a philtre for a mistress—tis true, I have lost a heart, but the marks of the dear thief are too strongly imprinted on it already.

Astrolabe. I perceive, sir, that the design of your visit is purely to vilify the science, and to cast aspersions on the honourable professors.

Chaucer. You mistake me! Lookye, sir, to make you a true judge of my affair, I ought to acquaint you that I am in love with a lady that is extremely superstitious, who, having heard of your fame, designs to consult you this morning in relation to her marriage. Now, that we may play the surest card, I shall only desire the favour of your habit, and the conveniency of your apartment, to treat with her in my own person.

Astrolabe. This would be mere prostituting the science. But to show you, sir, that my function does not straiten my civilities, upon promise of secrecy, I shall comply with your demands.

Chaucer. You may safely repose in me, sir. (*gives him gold*) I shall not disparage the science, I have all the twelve signs by heart; my memory is pretty well stocked with terms of art, and I can talk unintelligibly.

Astrolabe. You are pleased to make free with the profession, sir! This, sir, is my hieroglyphical cap, (*puts his cap on Chaucer's head*) and this, sir, is the mystical wand (*gives Chaucer his wand*) under covert of these necromantical vestments, you may approach the fair without the least danger of a discovery.

Chaucer puts on Astrolabe's habit

Chaucer. But pox on't, though, Doctor, methinks I look a little too young for a conjurer; a beard and a pair of whiskers would undoubtedly give a good magical air to my countenance, and add a kind of awful solemnity to my pronunciation. Come, prithee Doctor, you cannot sure be without such a convenience.

Astrolabe. Why, sir, that's true, sir! Lookye, sir: you have given me your honour to act with me like a gentleman, and rather than you shall be at a loss for so necessary an ornament, I will divest my own chin of its longevity. (*takes off his beard*) I am a young fellow you see, sir, that have made use of my fortune, and run myself head and ears in debt: I was forced to take up this way of livelihood to endeavour to retrieve my condition and screen myself from the bailiffs. If I can serve you in any other respect, you may command me, but for the present give me leave to attend you in this masquerade, as your servant; perhaps I may be necessary.

Chaucer. So much frankness and good nature surprises me.

Astrolabe. I considered that judicial astrology, as the world goes, was at best but an amusement, and set up at a small expense— that there was nothing requisite to give it credit but a solemn unintelligible jargon and an awful appearance.

Chaucer. Appearance, sir, bears away the bell, almost in everything. What composes a fine gentleman, but dress? A scholar is owing to superficial terms; the lawyer amuses you with a medley of law-terms and a face of importance, and if you go to the precise teacher, tis ten to one you will find all his religion lie in his cloak and band.

Astrolabe. To your post, sir; the lady appears.

Enter Myrtilla and Busie

Myrtilla. Is your name Doctor Astrolabe, sir?

Chaucer. Yes, madam, my name is Doc-tor As-tro-labe. Ger-ma-ny has the honour of my birth, and Scorpio was ascendant at my nativity. I am, madam, not only the seventh son, but the son of the seventh son. The occult sciences have been my study from the cradle; I have, my lady— by the way, you see I can give you a sketch of my proficiency, and show you that I am not unacquainted with your quality.

Busie. As I live, the doctor is in the right of it.

Myrtilla. Pray, cease your impertinence, and be silent.

Chaucer. I have, as I was saying, made practicable and by great labour and application brought to perfection the green and hermetical dragon; twas owing to my indefatigable searches, that the female fern-seed was brought to light. And if I can rely on some of the most plain phænomena of art, the philosophers' stone will not lie long undiscovered. My head, madam, is a mere microcosm, or, if you please, like the concave of the heavens, lined with planets, and powdered with the constellations. Perhaps, before I fall directly on the matter in hand, it will not be unnecessary to acquaint you with some of the sciences that lie within the circle of my profession. Astrology, astronomy, physic, metaphysics, palmistry, chiromancy, physiognomy, botany, optics, catoptics, dioptics, necromancy, divination, and algebra— with several others, which at this time would be too tedious to recount. Your business, madam, is inscribed in your forehead; and the fates decree you happiness— though I must acquaint you, you seem to embrace it with reluctance.

Myrtilla. I suppose, Doctor, since you say you are acquainted with my quality, you are not a stranger to my name.

Chaucer. Your name, madam, if my art fails me not, let me see... begins... aye, its first letter is an... M, and a Y seems to me to be the following vowel— if you will have me proceed, I will go quite through all the three syllables of it.

Busie. Myr- till- a: just three syllables, and no more, that is certain.

Myrtilia. (*to Busie*) Let not your tongue, I charge you, blab thus out of season. But Doctor, my business, I pray you?

Chaucer. Your business, madam, as the celestial globe informs me, lies in Gemini— that is to say, the House of Marriage.

Myrtilia. It may be so, sir... then I am married, I presume, Doctor?

Chaucer. No, madam, nor would be so, if your own inclinations took place. The gentleman, that at this time seems your aversion... will... make you happy.

Busie. Nay, now tis a plain case.

Myrtilia. (*to Busie*) Will you never have done your tittle-tattle? (*to Chaucer*) Has the gentleman, I pray, Doctor, that promises so much happiness. ever made his applications to me?

Chaucer. You beheld him... even with your own eyes... last night at an unseasonable hour, and it will not be long— many hours, I mean— till he honours himself with another visit. Credit my prognostications, and use him respectfully: hate, I find, is not his portion; love in the end will turn the balance.

Enter Alison

Astrolabe. Pray woman, don't be so troublesome. I tell you, the doctor is engaged, and cannot attend your business at present.

Alison. O' my conscience, great folks keep a cargo of impertinent servants about them, to defend them from visitants. If one's business leads one to dance attendance after quality, our message, forsooth, must be delivered at the door passage, and there, like a watch word through a camp, it must fly through at least half a dozen skips before it can reach my lord's ears! And now, forsooth, the world is come to a fine pass truly, that we must make application to the conjurer's imp, in our way to the conjurer.

Chaucer. Let the woman have her way.

Alison. Why, how now, Doctor? Do not you remember your old acquaintance? Harrow and alas! I believe I am mistaken: you are none of Doctor Astrolabe, I perceive.

Chaucer. Yes, Madam, I am Doctor Astrolabe. The chameleon, throughout all his colours, still retains the name of a chameleon, and so am I myself, madam, the same, throughout all my metamorphoses. We always, madam, suit our shape to the nature of the study we are intent upon.

Alison. Oh, I crave your mercy, good Doctor. Well, madam, has the doctor satisfied your curiosity?

Chaucer. That your ladyship may be ascertained that I do not deal in uncertainties, I can give you ocular demonstration of my infallibility. The looking-glass you see there, is my necromantic mirror, wherein I represent past, present, and to come. A thief starts up in it in the twinkling of an eye; and a lady may here behold her lover's picture without being obliged to the painter. What say you, madam, would you command my art to this further operation?

Alison. Sdiggers, a pretty question for a conjurer indeed! Raise him in your glass, Doctor, as soon as you please, I'll warrant you, she will be beforehand with you in her imagination.

Myrtilia. I presume, sir, there is no danger in the operation.

Chaucer. None: not in the least, madam. I must request the absence of those ladies. The affair only relates to you, madam.

Alison. Nay, pritheer Doctor...

Chaucer. Lookye, ladies, we can upon no account run counter to the established method of art.

Alison. Idad, I perceive that conjurers, as well as physicians and confessors, love to have the ladies under private examination. Good luck attend you, my dear.

Busie. May everything succeed according to your ladyship's wishes.

(exeunt Alison and Busie)

Chaucer. Situate yourself, my lady, exactly in this point of view, in the centre of the circle that I now describe, nor once presume to turn your head either to the right or left. I am afraid I shall have a difficult task to keep a pretty lady from giving herself airs, when there is a looking-glass in view. Be cautious, and fear nothing.

(He puts off the Conjurer's cap and beard, and puts on his Hat, &c. and peeps over her shoulder, as she looks in the glass.)

Thrice I wave my wand around,
And consecrate this spot of ground.
Zutphin, and Zephin, ye that reign
Far beyond the northern main.

Quickly, quickly take your flight,
And leave the dark abyss of night;
Hither, hither, gently fly,
Ye milder spirits of the sky,
Let now my science be your care,
And bring her lover to the fair.

Myrtilia. Hah!

Chaucer. Hold, hold, madam! Stand firm, guard your footsteps, and let the centre be still covered with the soles of female feet.

(He puts on his disguise again)

Swiftly, swiftly haste away,
And my inverted wand obey:
Let no hurly-burly rise;
Nor storms the face of heaven disguise;
Let the winds in silence lie,
Nor dreadful lightnings streak the sky;
Let thunder sleep, and calmness reign,
In fire, in air, in earth, and main,
Lightly skim the tops of mountains,
Nor blast the corn, nor taint the fountains,
Swiftly, swiftly haste away,
And my inverted wand obey.

The charm is finished. Well, madam, has my art convinced your incredulity?

Myrtilia. Is matrimony then to be inflicted on me as a penance, and am I unfortunate by necessity?

Chaucer. Believe me, madam, so many hours as you defend yourself from marriage, so many happy ones you strike out of the register of life. Your love, I foresee, as in common cases, is not to be trifled away in a tedious courtship; but is reserved, as an inexhaustible treasure, to sweeten the matrimonial condition.

Myrtilla. The gentleman, I must confess, has a world of valuable qualifications; and—since I find I must—I shall endeavour, in his next application, to treat him with more humanity.

Chaucer. Your resolution, I assure you, is founded on prudence, and established on wisdom: cherish the first motives of his love, and lay hold on Hymen's kind invitation. The gentleman I pronounce very deserving: his heart, I foresee, is the seat of constancy, and his love is as lasting as honourable.

Myrtilla. Well, sir, I believe I shall show that I entertain a good opinion of the doctor, by submitting myself to his prescriptions. (*Exit*)

Astrolabe. Well, sir, they are at last all very fairly dismissed. Your adventure, sir, is accompanied with the utmost of my good wishes.

Chaucer. I am at a loss to make you returns for so much good nature. For this fee, sir, you are obliged to the lady's superstition (*gives him what he had before received of Myrtilla*) and I hope my success will soon put it in my power, some way or other, to retrieve your fortune.

Exeunt

Scene: The hall.

Enter Franklyn, Doggrell, and Doublechin

Franklyn. Why, Frank, man, I thought a person of thy reading had known that a young giddy girl will make a world of doubles to lead her lover into a fault. An inconsiderate gipsy! What, throw dirt upon her ancestors?

Doggrell. Do not, sir, without further evidence, entertain the suggestions of your jealousy, nor censure the lady of an indiscretion which had its birth in your own fancy.

Franklyn. Give me leave to tell you, Frank, I know, and you shall receive immediate satisfaction from her own recantation.

Doggrell. An affair requires my attendance for a moment or two. I must beg your pardon, gentlemen. (*Exit*)

Doublechin. Oh sleep, sleep! The chamberlain thought fit last night to conduct me over the stable; and what with the noise of the horses and the carriers bawling conversation, I was forced, very much against the grain, to employ the whole night in meditation.

Franklyn. Poor Father, I pity you. But let us see you now deny yourself a nap by way of mortification. Watching is enough to founder your devotion, that is certain; for eating, drinking, and sleeping are the three main props of the order. But lookye Father, d'ye see, the case stands thus now: my daughter Florry does not lay Frank's love to heart, so much as she should do.

Doublechin. (*nodding*) Aye, it may be so.

Franklyn. Nay, but Father, let us give nature a fillip with t'other toast and sack. Hah, hah, Old Dominic, what say you, Father, would not a bottle, or a female confession, draw your attention now? Now you must know, I came to this conclusion—

Doublechin. (*nodding*) Very good.

Franklyn. (*bawls in his ear*) ...to this conclusion, I say!

Doublechin. Yes, yes, sir, I understand the conclusion, sir.

Franklyn. Now has his reverential drowsiness dreamt over all my thoughts, and waked just at the conclusion of them— (*hollers*) see hoy there.

Doublechin. Well sir, well sir... I hear you—you may go on.

Franklyn. My Florry, as I was saying, not setting a true value on Frank's love, has raised this scandal on her great-grandfather of her own invention, purely to disgust Frank in his proceedings.

Doublechin. ...to disgust Frank in his proceedings. Right, you say well, I hear you well enough, proceed sir.

Franklyn. Now granting this, though we allow the fellow stole her last night, we may with good reason conclude she was an accomplice in the theft.

Doublechin. Yes, an accomplice in the theft. I mind you sir; well, and what then?

Franklyn. Now, what would you advise me to do in this case? Why, lookye, sir, I have considered that while the ceremony of matrimony is in agitation, the man and wife must of necessity be of one mind. Now, I would have you go preach up obedience to my daughter; whilst I new-model Frank for a husband: and just as we have drawn them both in for their consent, you shall nick them slapdash with the ceremony.

Doublechin. ...slapdash with the ceremony, yes, sir, very well, then I am it seems to exhort her to filial duty.

Franklyn. Right, father: that was spoken now like a man with both eyes open.

Doublechin. You may rely on my pious endeavours, sir.

Franklyn. This key, father, is the only security I have of her duty, and this, putting confidence in the strength of your virtue, I deliver into your possession.

Exeunt severally

Enter Myrtilla and Busie

Myrtilla. The doctor's mirror has made so strange an impression on me that I cannot so much as endeavour to remove the fellow from my thoughts: I, this time, discovered something so mightily agreeable in him as struck me insensibly. I vow, Busie, my temper of a sudden is most unaccountably changed; dress again begins to be my care, and the thoughts of a convent are grown perfectly distasteful. Do these ribbons, Busie, suit my complexion?

Busie. They are most wonderfully becoming, madam.

Myrtilla. I begin to be sensible that those young ladies who protect their modesty in a nunnery lay themselves extremely open to censure and betray their secret inclinations. They deny themselves the conversation of mankind, just as a young fellow that is infected with play shuns a gaming-house; upon no account but because they are conscious they cannot resist the temptation. Is Mr. Chaucer, d'ye hear, Busie, returned from his travels?

Busie. Since I found him not worth your ladyship's regard, I never thought him worth my enquiry. But I some time since was accidentally informed, that he was expected; is Mr. Chaucer then the happy man at last, madam, to whom we are obliged for this deliverance?

Myrtilla. The doctor just now promised that he would make his addresses in person; and if this third circumstance should agree with the last night's and this morning's experiment, I fear

my resolutions would not be strong enough to deny him; I vow, I cannot tell what ails me, methinks, he grows more and more agreeable insensibly. — Hah!

Enter Chaucer

Chaucer. Sure I dream still, or has fortune thrown me at once on all my hopes? May I presume, madam, to give credit to my eyes, and call your name? (*sighs*) Myrtila.

Myrtila. You are not mistaken, Mr. Chaucer.

Chaucer. Then I must own myself your ladyship's convert and am now convinced that the presages of dreams are not to be ridiculed. I last night, madam, had the honour to see you; nor did my dreams deny me admission to your person. I spoke, I begged, I entreated: you still were silent, I afterwards aspired to touch your hand, you hastily snatched it from me. But then, madam, the morning entertained me with a more agreeable dream; methought you seemed with a kind smile to call me to you; at the charming voice I awaked in ecstasy—and morning dreams, I learnt from your ladyship's observation, are most to be relied upon.

Myrtila. I confess, I am mightily surprised to see you at this juncture. Destiny, I think, seems to throw you in my way in spite of my inclinations. As you are a stranger, sir, you now claim my civility; and I give you leave to credit your morning's amusement.

Chaucer. Tis love, madam, that hath blessed me with this interview, and I must unload my heart, and confess my passion, though I run the risk of your displeasure.

Myrtila. Your passion certainly must be very violent, that could support itself under so long an absence: as often as a traveller changes his climate, he lets out his heart to a new mistress; and you must think me a very credulous creature to persuade myself you have been constant all this time.

Chaucer. Faith, madam, I don't think that either sex ought to value themselves much upon that quality. But for constancy, as it passes at present, my heart is a *non-pareille*, and as well turned for a husband as any reasonable woman can require.

Myrtila. Now granting I should put such confidence in you, sir—really, you have surprised me in a mighty good humour! You must know, sir, the whim led me to consult a fortune-teller this morning, who has extremely diverted me.

Chaucer. I am glad to find, madam, you were so agreeably entertained.

Myrtila. The doctor has laid some obligations on you, sir, and appeared very zealous in your interest, I'll assure you: he engaged for your constancy, promised me happiness, and a world of fine things; if I thought convenient to follow his prescriptions—ha, ha, ha.

Chaucer. My passion, madam, is too serious an affair to be trifled withal. If delay separates us once again—

Myrtila. Why, I hope, sir, you are not about making another tour.

Chaucer. I don't know, madam, just as inclination leads me; my passions, I must confess, are a little predominant; and if they should command me to France or Italy again, I am afraid my good-nature would not be able to deny them, and then, madam, I'll warrant, I shall be compared to the winds that made me dance over the waves; I shall be as faithless as the sea and as unmerciful as the billows, when, in reality, my sails were only filled with the gales of your ladyship's inconstancy.

Myrtila. Well, sir, to deal then ingenuously with you: I would advise you to cast anchor: and if the winds are lodged in my power, you shall wait long enough till I oblige you with a fair gale.

Chaucer. And will your ladyship at last condescend to make me happy?

Myrtilla. The Fates, it seems, design it so, sir; ha, ha, ha.

Enter Doggrell

Doggrell. Fair lady, I beg your pardon—Mr. Chaucer, a word with you.

Chaucer. Nay, prithee, you see I am engaged: I hope your civility, sir, will not break in upon a lady's private conversation.

Doggrell. I presume, the lady will indulge me for a moment, since it is an affair of consequence. Madam, shall I beg the honour to deprive Mr. Chaucer of a minute or two of your most agreeable conversation?

Myrtilla. The gentleman is at his own liberty, sir— (*aside*) a formal coxcomb!

Chaucer. Some other time, sir, I will wait on you; an opportunity with the ladies must never be neglected. Sir, I am your humble servant: well, madam—

Doggrell. The lady's good nature will excuse my rudeness, sir.

Chaucer. (*aside*) Pox on it, these fellows stick as close to a man as a cast mistress; there is no dismissing them without present satisfaction. Well, sir—

Doggrell. I beg your pardon, madam, for this small breach of decorum; but I will return you Mr. Chaucer with all imaginable expedition.

Exit Myrtilla

You must know, sir, that I last night ran through the whole exercise of love: I was captivated, I courted, and won the fair. Oh, the most charming angel! then the wittiest creature that ever flirted a fan! and the most engaging shape and mien! Mere imagination elevates me into an ecstasy.

Chaucer. Well, sir, and what is all this to me, I pray you?

Doggrell. I beg your pardon, sir, I meant you no affront.

Chaucer. To abridge your story, I suppose you are married?

Doggrell. A secret, I know, sir, is safely lodged in the cabinet of your discretion. Yes, sir, the lady immediately took fire and on the spot treated me like a gentleman. I married her last night upon honour; and now am going to give her personal security, and sign the lease for life.

Chaucer. Really, sir, I am in no respect capable of keeping a secret of this nature; so, sir, your humble servant...

Doggrell. Nay, prithee, Mr. Chaucer—but I should first of all have acquainted you that she fell a victim to my poetry. And now, sir, to maintain my conquest, I have levied a stanza or two to bring down upon her ladyship, which I shall beg leave, sir, to submit to the candour of your judgment.

Chaucer. Some other time, you may command me, sir.

Doggrell. Now, sir—no, now—dear sir, I long to have your sentiments on the ode. See, sir, tis upon a fair lady's making me happy. (*gives him a paper*) Your reading the lines, sir, will do them a world of justice.

Chaucer. (*reads very carelessly*)

“Stanzas, upon a fair lady making me happy.

Ye gods! did Jove e'er taste such charms,

When pressed in fair Alcmena's arms,

O ye immortal powers!

For he in all his triple night,
Did ne'er enjoy such soft delight,
As I in half a one of yours."

Very fine, sir — very fine — (*reading on*)

"Oh ecstasy! what—"

Doggrell. Hold, hold, sir! Mark the harmony, sir, and the easy cadence that falls through the whole stanza.

"Ye gods! did Jove e'er taste such charms,
When pressed in fair Alcmena's arms,
O ye immortal powers!"

(*Repeats with affectation, and beats time, while Chaucer appears very uneasy*)

I defy the Italian to run more soft! See, sir, the first hint is perfectly Pindaric! But observe, sir, as most poets mount into sublimity at the close of a poem; I leave the common road, and start into the heavens at the very first flight. "Ye gods!" — now my breaking out into "O ye immortal powers," brings the scene of action in view, and the poet seems to be at that instant clasped into the embraces of his charming fair one... now mind the easy flowing softness of the following lines,

"For he in all his triple night..."

That "triple" is one of the most happy epithets! Virgil himself might not blush to have been the author of it.

Chaucer. Such harmony, sir, can never fail of chiming the lady into a second trance. But the beauties lie so near the surface that there is no room for a critic's discoveries—so, sir, your humble servant...

Doggrell. The next stanza—I beseech you, dear Mr. Chaucer.

Chaucer. But the incivility to the lady, sir—

Doggrell. Will give a gentleman of your capacity an opportunity of exerting his wit.

Chaucer. (*aside*) In my own defence then.

"Oh ecstasy! what wit can tell,
Those charms that lie beneath your veil
Those lightnings of your eye?
No longer then your beauty shroud,
Nor place the sun behind a cloud,
For ah! fair Nun, I faint, I die."

A nun, sir!

Doggrell. A secret, sir, touched at one end flies through the whole, like a train of gunpowder! You must know then, that there is a lady of quality who upon some disgust with the world, was about sheltering her virtue in a nunnery; I made my addresses to her, and vanquished her with as much ease as I write a couplet; but lest the lady should take a whim to recede from her engagements, I last night took possession before the writings were signed.

Chaucer. Last night, sir?

Doggrell. Yes, sir. She concealed her blushes with her veil; nor would consent to make me totally happy till the consummation.

Chaucer. (*aside*) Her virgin modesty, I find, would not permit her to sin but under covert. How happy was this coxcomb's presence to frighten me from the snare! The Muses then

hereafter shall still be my mistress, nor shall one lady pretend to engross what with good husbandry will oblige so many.

Doggrell. (*aside*) Let me die if he is not repeating my lines in a perfect rapture! See how good poetry strikes a man of genius. (*he advances to Chaucer*) But Mr. Chaucer, pray what think you of the last stanza? That admiration of her concealed beauties, shows wonderfully the vivacity of the poet's imagination. Now for my fair nun, sir. You will excuse me, Mr. Chaucer, since you know the occasion.

Enter Myrtilla

So, sir, your most obedient humble servant. Fair lady, yours most obediently.

Exit Doggrell

Myrtilla. The gentleman, sir, has entertained you with a mighty long conference; I am glad you were so well diverted: poetry, I presume?

Chaucer. Yes, madam, the gentleman has received some favours from his mistress, and his gratitude, it seems, hath led him to express himself in rhyme.

Myrtilla. Love naturally flows into poetry. I admire, sir, that your Muse was never so obliging as to throw away a few tender things upon the lady to whom you are so generous as to bestow your heart.

Chaucer. Really, madam, I never write elegy; my Muse does not delight in sighs and complaints, nor loves to bemoan absence and inconstancy. Don't you think, madam, that gentleman has a very happy talent of writing?

Myrtilla. Both the gentleman and his writings are strangers to me. The Fates you see, sir, have given you hopes; and suppose now I should confirm their decree, would not your Muse be so complaisant as to acknowledge the favour?

Chaucer. Methinks his lines have a peculiar softness in them; so easy, and so tender, that, like the Sirens, they at once charm and betray: they can disarm a lady's virtue, and lay her modesty asleep while they keep her inclinations awake. Stop your ears, madam, he is a dangerous fellow.

Myrtilla. This caution is useless, sir, since I am entirely a stranger to the gentleman. But you see, I dare trust myself in the sound of your poetry, sir; if I should be captivated, I know you are generous enough to treat your prisoner with honour.

Chaucer. Excuse me, madam, I am not disposed to write at present.

Myrtilla. (*turns from him*) Busie, what ails the fellow to treat me with so much indifference? His love is a mere ague, and the cold fit hath now seized on him. I'll again endeavour to hate him: and if I am decreed at last to sacrifice myself to one whose love dwindles into that cold term civility, I will only involve the latter scene of my life in matrimonial penitence.

Exeunt Myrtilla and Busie

Chaucer. I loved her, I must confess, while I believed her virtuous; but I will exert my reason, and disdain to make myself a husband to screen a woman's frailties from censure. Love avaunt, and welcome liberty!

Now blithe and debonair, I'll relish life,
Nor sour it with that lasting evil—wife!
My love at random through the sex shall fly,
And treacherous vows allure them to comply:
I'll artfully each tender fair subdue,
And, like themselves, for half an hour be true.

Act V. Scene I.

Scene: the hall.

Enter Busie to Chaucer

Busie. Oh, dear Mr. Chaucer, my lady is retired in the most grievous fret! Go, go, I am perfectly ashamed of you! You, a poet, and want assurance?

Chaucer. Lookye, my dear, to speak my sentiments freely: I would always have love and matrimony walk hand in hand; and Lady Myrtila shall have both the stars and my leave to dignify that gentleman with the title of husband, whom she last night made happy with her person.

Busie. Then the riddle is at last explained! Hath that coxcomb's folly boasted of favours from my lady, and were you so easy of belief, to distrust her honour? His vanity, sir, hath both imposed upon himself and you: for last night, missing my lady's nun's habit—I found the Wife of Bath's laid in its room—my curiosity prevailed with me to search her pockets, where I found this letter, which, I presume, will satisfy you to whom the gentleman owed those mighty favours. (*gives him a letter*)

Chaucer. His hand, and style, I'll swear—

Busie. O' my conscience, I fear she will never be reconciled to you. You was as cold and unmannerly as a morose husband; and those symptoms in an humble servant, Mr. Chaucer, let me tell you, give a lady too just occasion for resentment.

Chaucer. Scandal finds an easy passage to the heart; and what we fear we very readily believe.

Busie. See what a dance jealousy leads a man! Beware of this same passion in matrimony, sir, for then it will be a plaguy troublesome companion.

Chaucer. This mistake then, I perceive, is purely owing to a gamesome frolic of the Wife of Bath, who hath diverted herself at the expense of your lady's honour. Lookye, my dear, suppose now I could point you out a convenient husband, would the present be agreeable?

Busie. Really, sir, I have not vanity enough to set me out for a coquette. Humble servants nowadays are not to be trifled withal. And should I neglect a good offer, I fear the fate of an old maid would too late convince me of my folly.

Chaucer. Well, what think you then, my dear, of Mr. Doggrell yourself? He is a man of an estate, which you know, child, is the best of sauce for so constant a dish as matrimony; the Wife of Bath hath engaged him to give her nuptial security for her last night's favour; he will immediately fly to the habit: now if that is in your possession, make but yourself the *nun*, and you may commence *wife* as soon as you please. The dark—or a veil—creates you as good a lady as any in the universe.

Busie. Well; it pleases me wonderfully, indeed it does! I'll about it instantly; for I have secured the old lady from taking t'other trip in masquerade. But now to your affair, sir: go, and throw yourself at my lady's feet; touch again upon the string of love, while her passions are in a ferment, nor give her present resentment time to settle into a fixed aversion. Hold, sir, here she comes! I must fly, for I durst not be seen with you. (*Exit*)

Enter Myrtilla

Chaucer. I vow, madam, you treated me barbarously: here I have been ever since in contemplation of your beauties, wandering over your perfections, ransacking the skies for metaphors, and culling the goddesses for similes; while you most maliciously withdrew the original, and left me to finish the picture purely by the height of imagination.

Myrtilla. Oh dear, Mr. Chaucer! Do! Repeat me the verses, and you will oblige me infinitely.

Chaucer. Really, madam, I have quite forgot them.

Myrtilla. Nay, I long to hear them: the verses and the subject are, I suppose, both treated alike, soon forgotten. I swear I shall never forgive you, if you will not indulge me in this particular.

Chaucer. (*aside*) Pox on it, I have brought myself into a fine dilemma. Have I never a lucky thought about me? Yes, faith, this does.

I.

Daphne, a coy and foolish dame,
Flew from Apollo's charms,
Had he confessed in verse his flame,
She had flown into his arms.

II.

Whenever Orpheus touched the Lyre,
Or sung melodious airs,
He made the very stones admire,
And tamed the fiercest bears.

III.

Are ladies' hearts more hard than stone
Are wolves and bears less fierce?
Then, prithee, nymph, no longer frown,
But own the power of verse.

Myrtilla. Mighty pretty! wonderful gallant!

Chaucer. Well, madam, has poetry softened your passions? And will your love at last condescend to shake hands with destiny? Consider, madam, tis only in your power to delay it.

Myrtilla. It would be far more generous, I confess, to make my love a present; and methinks I would not wear out your love in expectation neither. You have my leave, sir, to go continue your addresses.

Chaucer. Come, madam, let your heart accompany your hand, (*takes her by the hand*) and double the value of the gift, by putting me in present possession.

Myrtilla. It would be in vain to be obstinate.

Chaucer. Let Hymen then, madam, join our hands; let us be complaisant to the Fates for our fortune, and readily embrace the happiness the stars have allotted us.

Myrtilla. You see, sir, I am not at my own disposal.

Chaucer. From this instant then I date my happiness.

Myrtilla. If it is decreed, sir——

Chaucer. Come on then, my charming fair:

Marriage, the chiefest good that mortals know,

Doubles our joy, while it divides our woe:

What anxious cares can then our bliss control,

When heaven assents, and love unites our soul?

Scene: Florinda's apartment.

Enter Doublechin to Florinda

Doublechin. I come, by your father's orders, to inculcate into you... the doctrine of obedience... watching and cares... and sack, will most certainly wear out this constitution of mine. Sleep, perhaps, madam, may weaken the force of my arguments—but, though, madam, I am a little drowsy in showing you your duty—I hope, you will be vigilant in performing it. Mr. Doggrell, madam, has most excellent capacities—for an husband; and I do not in the least question—but you have as excellent capacities for a wife.

Florinda. Well, sir, my father's pleasure, pray?

Doublechin. In brief, madam, to be as short as possible (*nods*) not to trouble you with circumlocutions (*nods*) but fall directly on the matter in hand. I vow, madam... drowsiness has almost broke the thread of my story... pray, madam, what is your will and pleasure, I beseech you?

Florinda. To be informed of my father's commands, sir.

Doublechin. Your father, out of his great wisdom, and worldly policy... has thought fit to make choice of Mr. Doggrell for your husband: and you have, it seems... endeavoured to cool the heat of the gentleman's passion... by throwing scandal upon your ancestors... we allow... you... madam, to sacrifice as many living reputations as you think fit... but calumny on the dead, methinks does not lie within the province of female conversation.

Florinda. Come, Father, enliven your understanding a little! Come, sir, here is Mr. Doggrell's health, and to the glorious and unspotted memory of my ancestors, (*drinks*) your judgment must tell you, sir, that love is an appetite that will not be regulated by another's palate. You that have been so long conversant with female confessions, cannot be ignorant of the frequent combats of love and filial duty. But you will pledge me, sir.

Doublechin. (*drinks*) Sleep will not give me leave to behold your eloquence in its utmost perfection: the beauty of the speaker gives a wonderful grace to elocution, and those pretty lips of yours, child, must have a mighty persuasive faculty.

Florinda. Come, Father, sprightly liquor, sprightly reason—what, refuse to pledge a woman? See how it smiles upon you, sir.

Doublechin. It must be very hard with a man, when neither sack nor a pretty lady can keep him awake—but sleep, madam, is very often an unmannerly and unsociable companion to the ladies; but now, madam, I have three arguments to convince you of the duty of filial obedience, and the first is this— (*drinks*)

Florinda. Right sir, I agree with you: the whole stress of the argument, I plainly perceive, lies in the words “filial” and “obedience.” But your glass, Father, come, sir, will you not give me leave to pledge you?

Doublechin. (*drinks*) Methinks, madam... the glass has a very quick circulation... but now, madam, the second thing I shall urge is that a daughter being not a free agent—

Florinda. Not a free agent! How, Father? What, compliment the sex with slavery? Marry a woman to her aversion, and give her a mortification for life? Our fortunes are very often bestowed on us, with too severe conditions. Can a father convert a sottish, morose husband into an obliging, well-bred companion? Can he put a churl in good humour, or make a brute in love with honour, and virtue? Can a father unite separate beds, and dissuade a loose, base fellow from a mistress?

Doublechin. Right, madam, right. (*nods*) But methinks, madam, you are a little in the wrong too... for women’s arguments are generally superficial... and we often assent out of complaisance. I protest, madam, the vows of our order begin to sit a little uneasy on me... give me a kiss, and wake me, my dear—

Florinda. I would not, for the world, have my beauty be accessory to the misleading ecclesiastical chastity! Fie, father, fie! I am concerned for you; practise mortification. See here Father! What, give love the preference to wine? Come, sir, let my health give new spirit to the liquor.

Doublechin. I would not have you though, madam, misconstrue this behaviour of mine, neither. I am not fuddled, madam, (*drinks*) I must beg your pardon a moment or two, the music of your voice, I swear, madam hath quite charmed my senses into a lethargy! When you find my argumentative faculty grow upon me, do you see—pray be so kind as to wake me. (*sleeps*)

Florinda. The wings of love shall soon bear me to my charming Merit. Just out of one cage into another—but in matrimony we are like turtles, and make confinement pleasant with an agreeable companion; sound asleep! Come, Father, deliver up your charge—(*takes the key out of his hand*) Oh, sir, your most humble servant! But stay—a disguise would secure my escape, and therefore I must request sir, you would oblige me with your habit. (*gently pulls off his habit*) Oh, dear sir, most wonderful complaisant! Come, my hood shall defend your bald pate from the inclemencies of the air. (*puts her hood on his head*)

And love like an apparition’s unconfined,
And scorns a leading-string, though young and blind;
Woman by nature all restraint disdains;
And she that wears will choose the nuptial chains. (*Exit*)

Scene changes to the Hall.

Enter Doggrell, meeting Alison

Alison. Ha, ha, stripling! The rogue’s dimples there betray his success! With what air did she receive you? Did not you observe love flush into her cheeks, and peep through her pretty sparkling eyes? Did she sigh out never a scrap of thy poetry? No squeeze by the hand, or a gentle tap with her fan? Idad, I knew she would fall a sacrifice to the Muses.

Doggrell. Ah, madam, the most lovely of her sex! Kind, tender and obliging! To find her pretty lips the very fountain of wit threw me in a perfect ecstasy; harmony dwells in her voice,

and zephyrs wanton in her breath; Venus sits in her features, and her mein confesses a Juno. Oh raptures and paradise!

Alison. Was you thereabouts, my man of might, twas I advised you, my lad, to bask it in the sun-shine of her eyes? Did not I tell you, that the lips were the readiest way to the heart? (*aside*) A rare pupil, i'fackins! Her breath sweet as balmy zephyrs! Slidikins, I begin to think myself young again. (*to Doggrell*) Well, but did you carry your point?

Doggrell. Ah, madam, infinitely beyond expectation! She was immediately captivated with my person, in love with my family, and, as I live, downright enamoured with my poetry.

Alison. Well performed, i'faith.

Doggrell. Her love, madam, I am convinced, is more sincere than the turtle's, more pathetic and transporting than the sparrows, and as immutable... as my own.

Alison. But heark'ye now, you ought to pursue the conquest! Sdiggers, I just now left her, and she sends this message to you; that nothing but a small indisposition should have hindered this morning's assignation: that half an hour hence, she will make the garden the scene of love. Here is a smart girl for you, true as steel, and as taking as tinder. Ah boy, tis my very life and soul to be the harbinger of Cupid. The garden—ah, my dear chicken, mind the garden—then consummate your vows, and sign the contract; and call Hymen to witness the bond. Women may change, and tis good to have security in these cases.

Doggrell. Ah, madam; security! I have all the security of a husband: her hand, her heart, nay all her charming person. I started, madam, with vigour into the race, and reached the goal of love the first heat. Methinks, I have flown into Elysium in a dream. Ah, Myrtilla, lovely Myrtilla! No more shall fleeting fancy raise her shadow, nor grasp a cloud for a celestial queen.

Alison. The garden, ah, rogue the garden! The garden is a most inviting place: sdiggers, I never think of a garden, but presently some of my youthful excursions pop into my memory. Ods-my-life, why a damsel hath not the heart to say you a negative No, in an arbour, man. Don't you remember the old song, boy?

Doggrell. No, I protest. Pray, madam, will you oblige me with it.

Alison. (*sings*)

There was a swain full fair,
Was tripping it over the grass,
And there he spied with her nut-brown hair,
A pretty tight country lass.
“Fair damsel,” says he,
With an air brisk and free,
Come let us each other know;
She blushed in his face,
And replied with a grace,
“Pray forbear, sir, — no, no, no, no.”

II.

The lad being bolder grown,
Endeavoured to steal a kiss,
She cried, “Pish! let me alone,”
But held up her nose for the bliss.
And when he begun,

She would never have done,
But unto his lips she did grow,
Near smothered to death,
As soon as she'ad breath,
She stammered out, "No, no, no, no."

III.

"Come, come," says he, "pretty maid,
Let's walk to yon private grove,
Cupid always delights in the cooling shade,
There I'll read thee a lesson of love."
She mends her pace,
And hastes to the place,
But if her love lecture you'd know,
Let a bashful young Muse,
Plead the maiden's excuse,
And answer you, "No, no, no, no."

Doggrell. Wonderfully entertaining I vow. But her ladyship's "no" would stand her in no stead at present. May I confide in you, madam? For my marriage is as yet a secret to mankind.

Alison. Marriage? Why, sure tis not come to that pass already.

Doggrell. We last night, madam, mutually exchanged our vows. And this morning I met her, by assignation; lovely as Aurora, led her to the priest, and have by his solemn assistance changed the beautiful nun into a bride.

Alison. Sdiggers! But you are not in earnest, I hope!

Doggrell. Yes, madam; tis unquestionably true. The Lady Myrtilia, is now, at this present instant, the lawful wife of Francis D'Ogrelle, Esquire. And I flatter myself that her interest at court will soon be able to honour her husband with a title suitable to the dignity of his ancestry.

Alison. (*aside*) Then, it seems, I have been playing a pretty game all this while. To let a young forward baggage here make me her bait to fish for a husband! Twas a little unchristian-like too, methinks, to take the advantage of an old woman. But slidikins, when there is a handsome young fellow in the case, "self" is the word, and we spare neither friend nor foe.

Doggrell. The good offices, madam, that you have done me in my late matrimonial negotiations make me request that you would honour my nuptials with your entertaining company. But hold, here comes my guardian. Be secret, I beseech you, madam, and let us not forestall the jest. Now will he nauseate my taste with the smell of the kitchen, after I have supped upon quality.

Enter Franklyn

Franklyn. The girl is a wag, Frank, a mere wag; and invented the story purely to exercise thy love. Come, come, marry her, boy, and make haste and get sons and daughters. She looks like a rare breeder, Frank.

Alison. Gad a' mercy, my bonny Franklyn. Give me thy hand, old chronicle: the rogue has got the very air of an old sinner. Ah shaver, we were merry grigs in times past, by my fay.

Franklyn. Let us mind my daughter first of all: young folks' appetites are keen. You are ready I see, Frank; my daughter shall make her entrance presently, and then... Frank...

Doggrell. (*aside*) Now dare not I make a discovery of my marriage, till my lady be present to support me against this old rogue's insolence.

Franklyn. Methinks, though, Father Doublechin is a little tedious in his conferences. Florinda, Florinda! What a vengeance, does nobody answer there?

Alison. (*aside*) Sheartlikins, we shall have rare work upon the anvil by and by.

Franklyn. Florry! Florinda, why, how now? What is here to be done? Nobody within there? (*listens*) Nothing stirring?

Alison. Then, by my troth, there is no danger of your daughter, old Nicodemus.

Franklyn. But I do not like this silent sort of matrimonial disputes—What, a plague on you all! If you don't open the door immediately, I'll rattle it down about your ears. (*he bounces at the door*)

Enter Doublechin with a hood on his head; gaping, as just come from sleep

Doublechin. (*gapes*) Yaw, yaw.

Franklyn. Why heigh-day: what is—yaw—the meaning of all this? Pox, where is my daughter? (*runs into the room*)

Doggrell. Father Doublechin found it convenient to indulge himself with the sweets of repose, after the fatigue of instructing a young lady, that is all—ha, ha, ha.

Re-enter Franklyn

Franklyn. Why, plague, thunder and combustion! Where is my daughter, I say? Lookye Father, none of your jokes, I beseech you!

Doggrell. As a trophy of his conquest—do you see, sir?—he has adorned his head with some of your daughter's favours, ha, ha, ha.

Alison. But hark you, old Jereboam; never give way to passion, man. Sbud! Was the girl my concern, he should give an account of his private behaviour. Bring them face to face, and sbuddikins, if guilt should chance to flash in my damsel's countenance, I would do no better nor no worse, but immediately qualify his reverence for a chanter, i'fackins, I would—

Franklyn. Where is my girl? My girl, I say.

Doggrell. Nay, now, sir, you discompose yourself; be calm, I beg you.

Franklyn. Why, heigh day. What, is the fellow dumb? Speak, or by Hercules this cane shall presently find you a tongue, sirrah. (*strikes Doublechin*)

Doggrell. Let me die, this is palpable incivility. I beseech you, sir, keep your passion within the bounds of decorum.

Doublechin. Why sir, why sir, one need be an Argus to keep guard on a woman. Now, you must know, sir, after I had... reasoned her into reason... I, I—

Franklyn. Well, and what then?

Doublechin. Why I fell asleep—yaw—and then, sir—

Franklyn. What then, sir, what then, sir?

Doublechin. By my order, I know nothing further. I was, after that, all in the dark.

Franklyn. By Jove, this is all a contrivance; a combination. Furies! I am tricked! (*runs stamping about the stage, and beats them all.*) Why, what in the name of thunder, you are all rogues alike! Confounded rogues, treacherous pilfering rogues!

Doggrell. Oh dear sir, tis only your age, old fellow, that protects you in these liberties.

Franklyn. Why, sirrah, if nothing else touches you, decency, rascal, decency should teach you, like the widow, to shed a tear or two. And you, there, Doctor Paunch, what, sleep upon duty, and wink at my daughter's escape? (*walks about talking to himself*)

Alison. Look in my face, old touchwood.

Franklyn. Well, and what then?

Alison. Have not I a bonny complexion, my heart of oak? Dost thou not trace the remains of beauty through every feature? Look again, man, view me all over, old boy. Slidikins, my face is like an ancient medal: antiquity does but add to its value. What say you, my lad, are you for t'other bout of matrimony, t'other trip to the Temple of Hymen? Hang sorrow: what you have lost in a daughter, man, make up in a wife.

Franklyn. Sbuddikins, I'll alarm all the country but I'll get intelligence of my girl. For who knows but this covetous rogue may have enticed her to sacrifice her fortune to a monastery? Ah, they have ruined many a poor foolish girl to enrich the brotherhood.

Alison. I advise you to a wife, my lusty Nestor; and at the same time that I prescribe you the medicine, I offer myself in person for the remedy. What think you, old grey-beard, dare you venture on a girl of my vivacity?

Doggrell. This, I vow, is just like taking advantage of a widow's tears for her first husband, by surprising of her into a consent to a second.

Alison. Sdiggers, dare you interrupt my *amour*, i'faith, out pops your marriage, and the old fellow's anger shall strike you dead like a thunderbolt. Lookye, sir, your daughter hath disposed of herself, you see, and in short, this complaisant gentleman has been led by the nose by love, and—

Doggrell. Nay, pray madam—faith madam—'tis downright uncivil—let me die—but you shall not—was my lady present, she would protect me from his insults. Pax then, if I cannot prevail with you, indulge your spleen, and discharge the secret. I'll hum a tune, and receive the storm with all the patience of an ancient philosopher.

Alison. In short, this same gentleman hath disposed of himself in marriage; and slidikins, we will marry in spite, and get heirs in defiance of age and the world: we will, chicken.

Franklyn. Married! The devil he is! To my daughter, I hope.

Alison. No, no, love hath made another choice for him. And for your daughter, my mind give me most plaguily, that the sly rogue that invited you to the wedding last night hath not had the civility to invite you a second time.

Franklyn. Death! a mere train of misfortunes! What, both of them obstinate wilful puppies! Why Frank, Frank, you did not think yourself a fit present for my daughter, it seems; but idad, I have your love ammunition in my hands, coxcomb, and you shall whistle for your fortune till the law forces me to surrender it.

Doggrell. (*sings*) Fa, la, la, la.

Franklyn. Why, you ungenerous rogue you, why sirrah, answer me.

Doggrell. (*sings*) Fa, la, la, la.

Franklyn. {*calmly*} Why, was this now, Frank, acted like a gentleman?

Doggrell.

Fair Amaryllis in a pleasant grove,

For her dear boy a flowery garland wove.

Franklyn. Why, what a vengeance, are all the folks mad or bewitched? Have you, sirrah, stole a marriage without the consent of your guardian, or not?

Alison. Revenge yourself by your own marriage, old boy, and balk all their contrivances.

Franklyn. Pox, and that is the ready way to have the revenge light on my own head too. Why, Frank now, prithee now, Frank, do not be inspired at present, but give a man a rational answer.

Doggrell. For Damon stayed; Damon the loveliest swain;

Franklyn. Bred up a child under my own wing, as a body may say —

Doggrell. And she the fairest nymph of all the plain.

Franklyn. Mad! stark staring mad! Why, Frank, sirrah!

Doggrell. Thus she complains, while all the feathered throng,

Franklyn. Death, and confusion!

Doggrell. And silence, listened to the mournful song.

Franklyn. A man of your amorous constitution Frank, can breakfast upon a smile, dine upon a kiss, and sup upon—pox, money would but make love mercenary.

Doggrell. Hold, hold sir, I am married, I confess; but both quality and fortune accompany the lady. She hath a purse that shall vindicate my right, and make you restore what you detain by fraud and injustice—but stay, yonder she comes, the most accomplished bride that ever blessed mortality. Youth, beauty, fortune, and quality.

*Enter **Busie** in a nun's habit*

This is my lady, sir. (*presents her to **Franklyn***)

Franklyn. And what then, sir?

Doggrell. Why, then sir, tis my lady, that's all. (*aside*) An unmannerly brute! (*to **Alison***) Madam, this blessing I owe to your generosity: my right honourable bride, madam.

Alison. Why, heighday! Legerdemain and necromancy! Why, Mistress Busie! art thou married in earnest, my dear girl? Ods-my-life, I wish thee joy child, with all my heart and soul. (*kisses her*)

Doggrell. Nay, pray madam, this familiarity gives quality distaste! Distance and decorum support their grandeur, ceremony keeps them out of the vulgar method of conversation. They are not pestered with the nauseous freedoms of friendship, nor subject to the forward liberties of good nature. Pray, madam, regulate your behaviour, and remember she is a woman of quality.

Alison. Ha, ha, ha—or the woman of a woman of quality, sir.

Doggrell. What do you mean, madam?

Alison. That your generosity, my son of Parnassus, hath laid hold of the maid instead of the lady.

Busie. Mr. D'Ogrelle's passion was not swayed by sordid interest; love was the only motive of his choice; and a mutual duty to each other shall make our lives glide on with serenity and show matrimony in its utmost perfection.

Doggrell. What have I done!

Franklyn. Hah, hah, Frank! My daughter cannot be set in competition with youth, beauty, fortune—and quality! She hath a purse, Frank, yes, yes, she hath a purse, for vindicating a husband's right, I don't in the least question, ha, ha, ha.

Doggrell. Faith, love hath not dealt by me like a gentleman, to reward a man of honour thus. Oh most egregious error! Embarrassed with a chamber maid, when I bid fair for a countess!

Franklyn. (*sings*) Dal te ral, tal lal.

Doggrell. Irretrievable loss! flung myself out of the *beau monde*, to be entertained with bone-lace and whipping of muslin.

Franklyn. (*sings*) Dal te ral, te ral.

Doggrell. I vow, this is most insupportable! What is your name, madam? Have you any family to make me satisfaction?

Busie. Busie, sir.

Franklyn. The Busies of Yorkshire, sir, as noble a family as any in Christendom; she bears for her coat, three needles proper, with a thimble argent for her crest— (*sings*) ha, ha, ha, tal deral.

Alison. Her great-grandfather was killed at the Battle of Cressy; and her great-uncle, in the fifty-ninth degree, was Groom of the Privy Stool to William the Conqueror—ha, ha, ha—

Enter Merit and Florinda

Merit. Sir, I come to beg your pardon, and your blessing.

Franklyn. (*to Florinda*) Apply yourself to your mother there, hussy! Idad, I will marry on purpose to get heirs to disinherit thee, gipsy.

Doublechin. Vindicate my honour, I beseech you, madam; here my honesty hath been called in question, my continency censured, and my virtue is at stake.

Florinda. Why, lookye, sir, then this was the case; love, by the help of a bottle of sack, charmed my honest Father here to sleep, to assist his constant votary, which is your dutiful daughter. Now you must know, sir, to secure my escape, my obliging Father's cowl and vestments were somewhat necessary: and so, sir, under ecclesiastical covert I retired to my lover.

Alison. (*to Merit*) Ah, rogue! Ifackins, I like a lad that pushes an *amour* to an extremity; that will not drop it for a disappointment, but enjoys the toil of an intrigue. But hark you, old boy, we are to match up it seems. Give me thy hand then, old Nestor, I will defy the world to show another such like couple, in the decline of their age. Ours is a mere Italian autumn, that even excels the Spring in its variety of beauty.

Enter Chaucer and Myrtilia

Hah! hah! Don Chaucer and the Lady Myrtilia! The Pilgrims here have made Hymen's the shrine of their devotion, instead of St. Thomas's. I hope, madam, you will approve of Mistress Busie's choice: she hath quitted your ladyship's service, and serves for the future under Mr. Doggrell. My daughter-in-law here is a volunteer under this gentleman's banner—and a random glance of mine, forsooth, has captivated my old hero here.

Chaucer. Ladies and gentlemen I wish you all joy.

Doggrell. Ah, Mr. Chaucer, love counterplotted me; and I dare swear, hath now taken his revenge on me, for my former cruelty to the ladies—this creature here—

Chaucer. Nay, sir, pray treat her like a gentlewoman: her family is, without dispute, of as great antiquity as any in England.

Doggrell. Then, madam, I fly into your arms: you want no accomplishment but fortune, and that, madam, you command by your alliance with me.

Chaucer. Destiny has at last crowned my wishes with the Lady Myrtilla, and I come now to invite the good company to celebrate the wedding.

Alison. Your ladyship married!

Myrtilla. The fates have so ordained it, you see, madam.

Alison. We wish your ladyship joy.

Doggrell. Mr. Chaucer, I vow this is mighty strange; but I heartily congratulate you. My ambition, madam, aspired to your ladyship; but my fortune, madam, threw me more upon a level. May your days, Mr. Chaucer, flow on with pleasure; may your nights be crowned with joy; may no cares intrude, and your matrimonial state be one constant calm. Soften my fate, madam, and for the future call my lovely bride here, your ladyship's companion.

Chaucer. We will all turn mediators, and reconcile differences at a more convenient opportunity. In the meantime let us lovingly take hands, and agree in a dance; come, I'll lead it up.

A dance

Chaucer.

She who by rules of superstition goes,
Upon herself does rigorous laws impose;
While fancy gives or takes away repose.
Yet why should I this female whim deride,
Since to her stars I owe my beauteous bride?
Through the whole sex this pious humour runs,
Were there no men, all women would be nuns.

Finis

Epilogue.

Spoken by Alison

The toil of wedlock five times bravely past,
You'll say, twas cruel to be balked at last.
Grown old in Cupid's camp, long versed in arms,
I from my youth have known the power of charms:
Was I to single combat ever slow?
Did I e'er turn my back upon the foe?
Is this the way old service is rewarded,
And must the joyless widow be discarded?
Stint me not, Love: but while I yet survive,
Throw in another comfort to the five.
Bless me! when I reflect on former days!
Youth can make conquests several thousand ways;
I danced, I sang, I smiled, I looked demure,
And caught each lover with a different lure:
In frequent wedlock joined, was woman still,
And bowed subservient husbands to my will.
If reason governs man's superior mind,
A ready cunning prompts the female kind.
Then learn from me—so Hymen bless your lives!
Preserve the just prerogative of wives;
Know to command each look, each tear, each smile,
With eyes, and face, and tongue, and heart beguile:
Ev'n he that loves in search of game to roam,
By feigned reprisals may be kept at home.
Whenever heaven was pleased to take my spouse,
I never pined on thought of former vows;
'Tis true, I sighed, I wept, I sobbed at first,
And tore my hair, as decent widows... must:
But soon another husband dried mine eyes;
My life, my dear! supplied the place of sighs:
Amidst continual love I've relished life,
A forward maid, and a triumphant wife.
Then grant, O Cupid, this my latest prayer,
If no kind husband will relieve my care;
Since inclination yet outlives my face,
At least indulge me with a *coup de grace*.